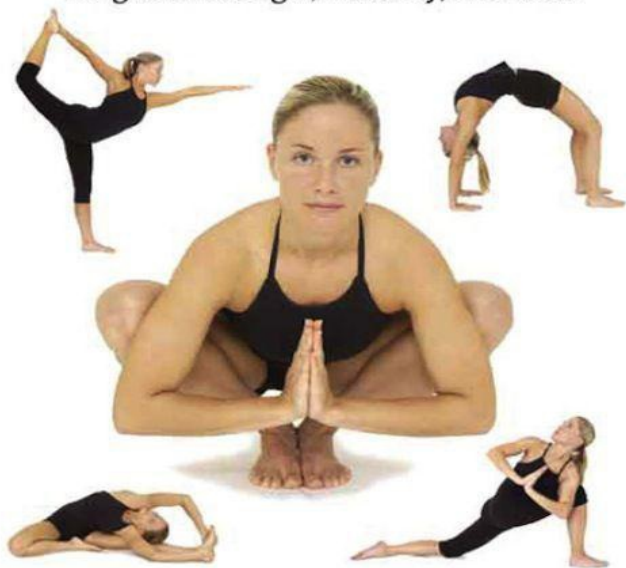


HATHA YOGA

Illustrated

For greater strength, flexibility, and focus



Martin Kirk • Brooke Boon • Daniel DiTuro

Library of Congress Cataloging-in- Publication Data

Kirk, Martin.

Hatha yoga illustrated /
Martin Kirk, Brooke Boon;
photography by Daniel
DiTuro.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical
references.

ISBN 0-7360-6203-

3 (soft cover)

1. Yoga, Hatha. I. Boon,
Brooke. II. Title.

RA781.7.K548 2006

613.7'046--dc22

2005011231

ISBN-10: 0-7360-6203-3

ISBN-13: 978-0-7360-
6203-9

Copyright © 2006, 2004
by Martin Kirk, Brooke
Boon, and Daniel DiTuro

All rights reserved. Except
for use in a review, the
reproduction or utilization
of this work in any form or
by any electronic,
mechanical, or other
means, now known or
hereafter invented,
including xerography,

photocopying, and
recording, and in any
information storage and
retrieval system, is
forbidden without the
written permission of the
publisher.

Photographs copyright ©
2002-2003 Daniel DiTuro,
all rights reserved. The
reproduction of any
photograph, in whole or in

part, by any means now known or hereafter invented is forbidden without the written consent of the copyright holder.

The Web addresses cited in this text were current as of July 14, 2005, unless otherwise noted.

Our thanks to Ted Czukor

for providing the text and information on mudras in [chapter 1](#) and many of the resources on [pages 218-219](#).

Acquisitions	Editor:
Martin	Barnard;
Developmental	Editor:
Julie Rhoda;	Assistant
Editors:	Carla Zych,
Alisha Jeddelloh,	Wendy
McLaughlin;	Copyeditor:

Lisa Morgan;
Proofreader: Pam
Johnson; **Graphic**
Designer: Robert
Reuther; **Graphic Artist:**
Tara Welsch; **Photo**
Manager: Dan Wendt;
Cover Designer: Keith
Blomberg; **Photographer**
(cover and interior):
Daniel DiTuro; **Art**
Manager: Kareema
McLendon; **Illustrator:**

concept by Nora and Ted
Czukur, redrawn by
Kareema McLendon-
Foster

Human Kinetics books are
available at special
discounts for bulk
purchase. Special editions
or book excerpts can also
be created to
specification. For details,
contact the Special Sales

Manager at Human
Kinetics.

Printed in Hong
Kong 10 9 8 7 6 5

Human Kinetics

Web site:

www.HumanKinetics.com

United States: Human

Kinetics

P.O. Box 5076

Champaign, IL 61825-
5076

800-747-4457

e-mail:

humank@hkusa.com

Canada: Human Kinetics

475 Devonshire Road Unit
100

Windsor, ON N8Y 2L5

800-465-7301 (in Canada
only)

e-mail:

orders@hkcanada.com

Europe: Human Kinetics

107 Bradford Road

Stanningley

Leeds LS28 6AT, United
Kingdom

+44 (0) 113 255 5665

e-mail: hk@hkeurope.com

Australia: Human Kinetics

57A Price Avenue

Lower Mitcham, South

Australia 5062

08 8372 0999

e-mail:

liaw@hkaustralia.com

New Zealand: Human

Kinetics

Division of Sports

Distributors NZ Ltd.

P.O. Box 300 226 Albany

North Shore City

Auckland

0064 9 448 1207

e-mail:

info@humankinetics.co.nz

To my wife, Jordan Kirk
and my son Jonathan,
and to my teachers Karen
Wilson and Douglas
Brooks

Martin Kirk

For my husband, Jarrett,
and my beautiful children,
Jory, Jace, and Brynn

Brooke Boon

To Brenda and Brandy

Daniel DiTuro

Contents

Preface

Acknowledgments

Introduction

**chapter 1 Art and
Practice of Hatha Yoga**

Roots of
Yoga

Getting the
Most From Your Yoga
Practice

Learning to
Meditate

Using the
Asanas in This Book

chapter 2

Postures

Standing

Mountain

Downward-

Facing Dog

Extended

Side-Angle

Triangle

Warrior II

Crescent

Lunge

Warrior I

Revolved

Extended Side-Angle

Revolved

Triangle

Chair

Standing

Intense Spread-Leg Pose

Beam

Humble

Warrior

Intense

Side-Stretch

chapter 3
Postures

Balancing

Eagle

Tree

Tiptoe Pose

Boat

Revolved

Half-Moon

Standing

Extended-Leg Stretch

Warrior III

Dancer

Half-Moon

chapter 4 **Arm - Balancing Postures**

Inclined

Plane

Lateral

Inclined Plane

Crane

Peacock

Four-

Limbed Staff

chapter 5
Postures

Inverted

Shoulder

Stand

Plow

Legs-Up-
the-Wall

Head Stand

chapter 6 Backward- Bending Postures

Cobra

Facing Dog

Upward-

Camel

Bridge

Bow

Locust

Facing Bow

Upward-

Fish

Cat–Cow

Pigeon

chapter 7 Postures

Twisting

Spinal Twist

Gentle

Reclining

Spinal Twist

Simple

Sitting Twist

Bound Half-

Lotus Twist

Seated

Spinal Twist I

Seated

Spinal Twist II

chapter 8 **Forward- Bending Postures**

Seated
Forward Bend

Standing
Forward Bend

Head-to-
Knee Forward Bend

Revolved
Head-to-Knee Forward

Bend

Open-Angle

Side Open-Angle

Three-Limb

Intense Stretch

Garland

Splits

chapter 9

Postures

Sitting

Lotus

Looking

Within

Baby

Cradle

Hero

Kneeling

Pose

Lion

Cow Face

Staff Pose

Yoga

Sealing Pose

Heron

Sage

chapter 10 **Reclining and Relaxation Postures**

Chest Knees-to-

Hero Reclining

Big-Toe Reclining

Reclining
Bound-Angle

Reclining
Open-Leg Spinal Twist

Supported
Bridge

Supported
Hero

Child's
Pose

Corpse

chapter 11 Routines

Hatha Yoga

Yoga I

Gentle

Yoga II

Gentle

Flexibility I

Yoga for

Flexibility II

Yoga for

Yoga I

Vinyasa

Yoga II

Vinyasa

Yoga III

Vinyasa

Salutation I

Sun

Sun

Salutation II

Moon

Salutation I

Moon

Salutation II

Suggested Readings

Resources

[Index of Asanas](#)

[About the Authors](#)

Preface

A journey
of a thousand
miles begins
with a single
step.

**Chinese
proverb**

Similarly, the journey to

write and illustrate this book began with a single photograph shot in February 1999. Like many events in life, it was unplanned. I had been practicing hatha yoga for about six months and was already sold on its therapeutic benefits. When the model I was photographing sat cross-legged on the floor and

arranged her flowing dress around her, I asked her to place her hands in Namaste (prayer position) and close her eyes. I titled the photograph Namaste. It is still one of my favorite photographs from what would eventually evolve into The Yoga Project, a photographic work with a mission to inspire and enlighten people about the

mental, physical, and spiritual benefits of yoga.

As my journey of yoga continued, I was surprised and disturbed by the many misconceptions people had about this ancient East Indian philosophy. Many of my friends mistakenly believed it was a religion and insisted they would never practice yoga because it would

interfere with their religious beliefs. Many male friends insisted that guys don't do yoga. I shared my yoga photographs with them, illustrating the true nature of the yoga practice, emphasizing that yoga is not aligned with a specific religious practice but that it is inclusive of all people. Some were amazed,

others were intrigued, and yet others remained skeptical. It became clear to me then that much more needed to be done to educate people about the real mental and physical benefits of yoga—especially hatha yoga, the practice of physical yoga postures. Although hatha yoga is a small branch of all the yoga

practices, it has become the Yoga Project's main emphasis due to its popularity in the West. Additionally, the Yoga Project works to inform and educate people about meditation and pranayama.

Hatha yoga can calm the mind, provide a gentle workout, or make you sweat. It can reduce your

heart rate when you are stressed or elevate it by providing a vigorous workout. Many refer to it as a New Age practice, yet its origin dates back thousands of years.

Whether you are new to the practice of hatha yoga, or simply curious about it, this book provides practical, detailed information you can use

throughout your daily life and in your yoga practice.

Chapter 1 provides background information about yoga and how to get the most out of your yoga practice. Chapters 2 through 10 then provide detailed information for 77 asanas classified by the type of posture. Included are standing postures, balancing postures, arm-

balance postures, inverted postures, backward-bending postures, twisting postures, forward-bending postures, sitting postures, and reclining and relaxation postures. Each asana has photographs depicting the starting, intermediate, and final positions accompanied by detailed step-by-step instructions. In addition,

you will learn about the asanas' mental and physical benefits, contraindications, counterposes, and gazing points (drishtis). Most asanas include a gentle variation for beginning, less flexible, or physically challenged students as well as variation postures to enhance your yoga practice. Chapter 11

illustrates 11 hatha yoga routines ranging from a very gentle routine, consisting primarily of supported postures, to more vigorous vinyasa (flow) yoga, including the Sun and Moon Salutations, in which you proceed from one posture to the next with little or no rest.

There are many schools

of hatha yoga. Each school offers something unique. Unlike many other forms of physical activity and spiritual practice there is a level and style of hatha yoga for almost everyone. Authors Martin Kirk and Brooke Boon are both certified instructors in alignment-based yoga and the Baptiste Power Yoga school, respectively.

Sanskrit, the ancient Indian language in which the original yoga texts were written, is used throughout this book. If you are new to yoga, do not be intimidated by the Sanskrit words. As your journey to yoga progresses, learning some of the Sanskrit terms and posture names will enhance the journey and

not impede it. If the only Sanskrit words you ever learn are asana (posture) and Namaste (the light in me honors the light in you) you will have taken one of the steps on your yoga journey.

Namaste,
Daniel
DiTuro

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank God for the gift of yoga. I have been blessed with a passion for teaching and am so grateful for the ability to share that passion through works such as these. I am always amazed at how we

are used in our lives if we surrender what we think we should be to the Creator and Perfector of all things. Only then are we free to become exactly what we were created to be; big, bright, purposeful, relevant beings. I am appreciative of the abundance that I have received through trust and faith.

A special thank you to my coauthors Martin and Jordan for their expertise, willingness to combine efforts, and unwavering dedication, and to Daniel for his photographic talent.

To my husband, Jarrett, and my children, Jory, Jace, and Brynn, the greatest joys in my life. Thank you for seeing me through deadlines and

sleepless nights when I was less than agreeable. I appreciate your unconditional love and respect for my personal growth and for seeing in me all that I am now only beginning to see in myself. Mostly, thank you God for giving my life meaning and using me for Your glory.

Brooke Boon

To my beloved wife and partner in teaching, Jordan, who came into my life and gave me the courage to take the bold step from engineering designer of space satellite electronics to full time yogi. She is the one who deserves the credit for this work with her tireless writing, critiquing, and editing the asana

descriptions and spotting and directing the photo sessions. This book would not have been possible without her. She is ever my beloved teacher and friend.

To my philosophy teacher and mentor, Professor Douglas Brooks, who helped with scholarly details for the book and who has

provided guidance and amazing wisdom from the day we first met.

To my coauthor, Brooke, for graciously accommodating the differences in our styles and wholeheartedly embracing our work together as a team.

Thanks to Daniel DiTuro for the excellent photographic and

coordination work that allowed Brooke and me to write this book.

Mostly, I want to thank my mother and father for always being willing to answer my questions and expose me to new ideas. They have always encouraged me to follow my heart.

Martin Kirk

This book would not have been possible without the support of dozens of people who dedicated hundreds of hours to bring an idea to reality. First, I must thank Brenda Godfrey, friend, model, makeup artist, hair stylist, and photographer, who inspired the creation of the Yoga Project which eventually lead to writing

and photographing this book. A book of this magnitude is not possible without models. Brandy Maktima was one of the original Yoga Project models and a principal model for this book. A special thank you to Brandy's husband, Tony, who cared for their children while Mom was modeling. Pamela Scott

modeled the alternate nostril breathing sequence.

An instructional book about hatha yoga required the knowledge of highly trained and certified yoga instructors. My coauthors, Martin and Brooke, contributed their expertise and insight for the benefit of current and future yogis. This book would not

have been possible
without them.

Wayne Johnson and
Debbie Forrestt have both
greatly contributed to my
knowledge of yoga.
Wayne, I am glad you
decided to teach yoga and
for your advice, critique,
and assistance
photographing the
supported postures in this
book. Om Shantih,

Wayne. Thank you, Debbie, for convincing me that 98 percent accuracy was not good enough. Many people worked behind the scenes to create the photographs for this book. I am grateful to Marylove Jacobs and Ann James for assisting during the photo shoots and to Jim Adair for convincing me that digital

photography rules. Jordan Kirk spotted many of the active postures and modeled vinyasa yoga routines II and III. Her knowledge, time, and efforts modeling, selecting many of the photos appearing in the book, and editing the manuscript are greatly appreciated. My thanks to the staff at Hugger Mugger Yoga

Products for their assistance in selecting many of the props used to photograph the asanas in this book.

A very special thank you to Martin Barnard, Julie Rhoda, and Dan Wendt of Human Kinetics for their support, guidance, and assistance in bringing a concept to reality.

Daniel DiTuro

Introduction

Welcome to the practice of yoga. With this book you begin a wonderful journey of discovery into your body and yourself that will help you find your fullest potential physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Whether you

come to yoga in search of greater strength and flexibility, physical healing, or a deeper understanding of life, this great path has something to offer you. For thousands of years, travelers have trod this inward path before you, so the trail is well marked. Your own yoga journey will be as individual as you are, but you will never

travel alone. You will become part of a great caravan of grace among others who seek to enrich their lives and make the world a better place.

Anyone can benefit from the practice of yoga. People of all ages, backgrounds, cultures, and religions come to yoga. Some are in great health; others come with

injuries or physical limitations. Some travel for a brief distance along the path; others embrace the journey as a lifelong pursuit. This great practice is big enough for everyone with the desire to improve their health and learn to live life from a place of joy and adventure. Regardless of your starting point, there is no

doubt that you will meet many like-minded travelers on your journey. Yoga is enjoying an unprecedented surge in popularity in the West, with an estimated sixteen million Americans practicing some form of yoga. There are classes for all levels and a variety of different styles from which to choose. You can

begin your journey from right where you are today in the manner that speaks most to your heart.

This book serves as an introduction to yoga for many and as a guidebook to continue the journey for others. The majority of the information provided concerns the physical postures of yoga, the *asanas*. Each asana

contains detailed information about getting into the pose, finding proper alignment, and obtaining the greatest benefit from your practice. Introductions are also provided into the practices of *pranayama* (yogic breathing), *mudras* (yoga of the hands), and meditation. Any of these practices can be helpful to

you in your life. Taken together, these great practices can be quite transformational.

Most Westerners think of yoga as the set of postures and breathing exercises known as *hatha* or “sun and moon” yoga. This is the physical yoga practice that uses body postures to open the body and heart. But yoga is

much more than a physical practice. The science of yoga is thousands of years old. It is an entire system with its own set of moral codes, breathing disciplines, and meditation techniques designed to take you along your spiritual journey.

The word *yoga* is classically translated as

“union.” It is a drawing together of heart, mind, and body that integrates all the parts of ourselves into a unified whole. Just as a team performs at its best when all the members line up behind a common goal, we will be at our best when every part of ourselves is in alignment with every other part. We are happiest

when we are following our hearts and doing what we really love. In essence, when we bring our hearts, minds, and bodies into alignment, we step into the flow of grace that is yoga. The journey of yoga is an inward search to find the very best within us and then to learn to express that every day in our bodies, minds, and

hearts.

Many of the practices we see in modern yoga are quite old, while others are surprisingly young. The physical yoga we know today as *hatha* is not even mentioned in the earliest yoga texts. Yoga has always evolved to meet the needs of the people and the time. In fact, many of today's

hatha yoga postures are less than one hundred years old. They can be traced to Tirumalai Krishnamacharya, a five-foot, two-inch South Indian man born in 1888 in a small Indian village. Krishnamacharya learned yoga from his father as a young man and decided to teach it to others. *Hatha* yoga was not well known

in India in those days, however, and his early teaching years were a struggle for financial survival. Then in the 1930s he was given the position of teaching yoga at the gymnastics hall of the royal palace. His students were primarily active young boys bustling with energy, and Krishnamacharya knew he

had to keep them busy. So he borrowed from the disciplines of gymnastics and Indian wrestling to produce a dynamic series of postures that would fit their active demeanor. His series of asanas still persists today and is known as *Ashtanga Vinyasa Yoga*, a system popularized by one of his primary students, Pattabai

Jois. Yoga continues to evolve. The skillful use of alignment in the yoga asanas was mastered and shared with the world by B.K.S. Iyengar, another well-known and highly respected student of Krishnamacharya, who, in his eighties, still teaches yoga today. And many former students of B.K.S. Iyengar, now well-known

instructors in their own right, continue to innovate to this day (Rodney Yee, Angela Farmer, Victor Van Hooten, and others).

The asana descriptions in this book are primarily based on a set of principles from alignment-based yoga. These principles have helped thousands—beginners and seasoned students

alike—to take their practices to new levels while supporting sound alignment of body, mind, and heart. Additionally, they have been used with great success for the treatment and prevention of injuries.

The documented medical benefits of yoga include increased strength and stamina, relief of

stress and anxiety, and lowered blood pressure. Most students find that they feel better with a regular practice of yoga in their lives. Whether you are seeking to improve your athletic performance, heal an old injury, or increase your flexibility, you will find the practice of yoga to be filled with rich traditions and meaning

that can enhance your quality of life. And do not measure your success in yoga by how well you are able to do a particular pose. Just enjoy the ride. For with yoga, as with any worthwhile undertaking, the joy is in the journey, not the destination.

Enjoy your yoga journey.

chapter 1

Art and Practice of Hatha Yoga

Yoga is the human quest for remembering our true nature, our deepest selves. Since the dawn of recorded time human beings have sought to transcend the human

condition, to go beyond ordinary consciousness. Basic questions such as *Who am I?* and *Why am I here?* have driven mankind's spiritual pursuits for millenia. In every human heart lies a deep longing to connect to something bigger than oneself, to find a sense of belonging and meaning to life. At the core of this

longing is a basic human desire for happiness that transcends culture and time. Every human being wants to find happiness.



This quest for happiness is not so much a striving to acquire something that exists outside of us as it is an innate desire to *remember* something that is part of our very nature. First and foremost, yoga is about remembering ourselves, our own deepest purpose for being. The journey of yoga is an inner journey to the

very essence of our existence. The message of yoga is that the nature of that inner essence is happiness or bliss (*ananda* in Sanskrit). The search for happiness within every human heart is the search for the true nature of who we are.

Nowhere on earth has the impulse to transcend the human condition been

more consistent and creative than in India—home to an overwhelming variety of spiritual beliefs, practices, and approaches designed to help the spiritual seeker achieve higher levels of consciousness. The practice of yoga is deeply woven into the rich Indian culture and evolved from the same roots as many

other spiritual practices. As an ancient science, it was designed to facilitate the seeker's inner journey to a higher level of being.

Though the art of yoga is often associated with Hinduism, yoga is not a religion. While a religion emphasizes belief structures about life and the human relationship to the divine, yoga seeks to

reveal our own deepest nature through direct experience of our divinity. One need not be religious to practice yoga, nor does yoga exclude any religious practice. All that is required to practice yoga is a desire to learn more about yourself and your relationship to the universe.

The Sanskrit word *yoga*

means “union” or “yoking” and has been defined as the union of mind and body, heart and actions. The type of yoga that most Westerners recognize is the series of physical postures, or *asanas*, that strengthens and makes the body more flexible. This form of yoga is referred to as *hatha* yoga. But hatha yoga is

much more than just a physical practice. The word *hatha* is a Sanskrit combination of the word *ha* (sun) and *tha* (moon), which is itself a union of opposites. Qualities associated with the sun are heat, masculinity, and effort, while moon qualities are coolness, femininity, and surrender. Hatha yoga is designed to help

us bring pairs of opposites together in our hearts, minds, and bodies for the purpose of discovering something deeper about the nature of our existence. These opposites have been referred to as stepping stones on a path of grace. They are qualities of heart such as effort and surrender, courage and

contentment, stillness and playfulness. They may also be physical qualities such as hard and soft, hot and cold, solid and flowing. In essence, the practice of yoga brings together apparent opposites into a harmonious union—a place in the middle.

This middle place is a gateway into a whole new

world for most of us. It is a place where we discover wonderful new things about our abilities and possibilities for our lives. It is a gateway into our own hearts. When we step through this gateway we do not step alone. We find before us the footprints of many who have gone before and illuminated the path. We find ourselves in

the current of a great river that has carried the hopes and dreams of many seekers over the centuries. There is power in the river that will help us along our own spiritual journey, the power of grace. And by stepping through that gateway into the currents of grace, the yogi steps forward into ever-greater possibilities

of his or her own
happiness and self-
expression.

Roots of Yoga

The earliest recorded form
of yoga was a deeply
introspective and
meditative practice that
focused on sacrificial
rituals. Yoga is first
mentioned in the *Vedas*, a
body of four sacred texts

that are the oldest and most treasured scriptures of the sacred canon of Hinduism. It is in the oldest of these scriptures, the *Rg* (pronounced rig) *Veda*, where the word yoga and its root, *yuj*, which means “yoke,” first appear. However, at that time no systematic path of yoga yet existed.

Most scholars believe

the *Vedas* were composed by Sanskrit-speaking people who arrived in the Indus Valley of what is now India somewhere between 1800 and 1500 B.C.E. It is not clear whether these people, calling themselves Arya, invaded or peacefully assimilated the prevailing culture into their own, but they brought with them the

earliest roots of what we now enjoy as the practice of yoga.

Veda means “knowledge” or “wisdom,” and the original four texts are regarded as sacred revelations to the ancient seers (called *rishis*). They consist of literally thousands of verses of hymns and sacrificial chants designed to bring

order and good fortune to those who invoke them. Two more texts, the *Brahmanas* (1000 to 800 B.C.E.) and the *Aranyakas* (800 B.C.E.), followed.

The *Vedas* and their commentaries were essentially how-to guides for ritual and sacrifice. They gave people instructions on how to

make their lives better and attain success in marriage, business, war, and so forth. If you wanted to ensure success during Vedic time you would hire a priest to perform a ceremony from one of the Vedic texts.

At the end of the Vedic period (about 600 to 550 B.C.E.) there was an evolutionary leap in yogic

thought with the appearance of the *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads* went beyond the instruction manual approach of the *Vedas* to ask the deeper questions about the meaning of a spiritual life.

The word *upanishad* comes from the prefixes *upa*, (approach), and *ni*, (near), and the verbal root

shad, “to sit.” It literally means “to sit nearby.” The *Upanishads* serve as an invitation to come and sit near a teacher who can impart the wisdom of deeper understanding to the student. It was customary in Vedic times for students to gather around at the feet of their teacher and learn his wisdom by heart. But the

Upanishads raised the bar for the inquiry into the mysteries of life beyond that of the Vedas. In the words of Douglas Brooks, Tantric scholar and professor of religion at the University of Rochester, the *Upanishads* were for those who wanted to “stay after school,” to go deeper and ask not only how the universe works but why

does it work the way it
does, what is its essential
nature, and what is my
place in it?

For fear of
whom fire
burns, for
fear of whom
the sun
shines, for
fear of whom
the winds,

clouds and
death
perform their
offices?

Tattrirya Upanishad

It is the deeper inquiry
of the *Upanishads* that
defines the evolutionary
path to the yoga that we
know today. Over the

centuries the *Upanishads* became the sustaining original wisdom of all great yoga traditions.

The early centuries before the Christian era were rich in the development of Indian thought. Near the time when the *Upanishads* were being composed (or slightly later) the legendary sage and

scholar Patanjali was compiling his list of *Yoga Sutras*. The word *sutra* is composed of two parts, *su*, meaning thread and *tra*, meaning to transcend. The *Sutras* are like pearls on a thread that helps the student to transcend. They are the threads that weave together the teacher, the teaching, and the student. The *Sutras*

were composed as a list of aphorisms boiling down the yogic wisdom of the age into concise sentences that could easily be committed to memory. Their terse nature left them open to interpretation, leading to a long period of commentary and analysis that continues to this day. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*

became the cornerstone in the system known today as Classical yoga, which is explored in greater detail in the next section.

Three Yogic World Views

In the West, yoga is often confused with Hinduism. It is understandable that people group the two together because they

share a common culture, language, and terminology. Both traditions trace their roots back to the *Rg Veda*. The common basis for both traditions is the Sanskrit language. In India many Hindus practice yoga, but not all yogis are Hindu.

Yoga is a philosophical system that prescribes a way of life and is actually

just one of the philosophical schools recognized by Hindu orthodoxy as a valid representation of Vedic truth. There are many such schools that have played a role in the evolution of Indian thought. Each school is a form of philosophical thought that has evolved in India throughout the

centuries. Several of these systems have been exported to the West, and particularly the United States, over the years. With the recent, unprecedented rise in the popularity of hatha yoga it is important to identify the foundations on which modern yoga systems are based.

Among the exports of

Indian thought, three philosophical traditions now form an essential core within contemporary yoga: Classical yoga, Advaita Vedanta, and Tantra. Every popular system of hatha yoga in the West today is grounded in the philosophy of at least one of these three schools. The work of Tantric

scholar Douglas Brooks discussed next provides a foundation for understanding these three systems.

Classical Yoga

Classical yoga is the name given to those schools of yoga that consider themselves the most authentic representatives of

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. It is a dualistic philosophy that draws a clear distinction between the two major "substances" of the universe, *prakriti* (matter) and *purusha* (spirit). In Classical yoga matter and spirit are qualitatively different realities that never mix or join together. Spirit is absolute, unchanging, and

superior to matter. Matter is relative, changeable, and inferior to spirit.

The essential nature of human beings is pure spirit, while everything in the physical world, including emotions and thoughts, is considered material. Human suffering is the result of confusing one's true nature with this lesser, material reality.

The goal of Classical yoga is to separate these two realities, to extract one's true nature from the body/mind. It is designed to help students experience their immortal spirits. The goal of the yoga practice is to get into the body so you can get out of it. Sometimes these practices include harsh discipline that requires

students to push beyond the pain in order to realize that they are something other than their bodies or their feelings. Because the body is inferior, it must be disciplined into submission so that spirit may be realized. If you are in a yoga class with a Classical yoga influence there will likely be a strong emphasis on controlling

the body and mind through discipline. You may hear phrases like “push through the pain” when the postures become especially challenging.

For the Classical yogi the body and this physical life are problems to be solved. Birth is the result of a failure to realize our true nature in a previous

life, and we are sentenced to come back again and again until we realize the truth. Freedom from the prison of embodiment comes when the seeker isolates the experience of pure spirit from the lesser realities of body, mind, and thoughts.

Advaita Vedanta

Vedanta means

“conclusion or end of the *Vedas*,” because this method is based on the last set of Vedic texts and teachings, the *Upanishads*. In contrast to the dualistic philosophy of Classical yoga, *Advaita* (nondual) Vedanta negates the concept of separate realities for matter and spirit. In *Advaita* Vedanta only spirit

is real; matter is an illusion. Our experience of matter, our bodies, our thoughts and feelings, and embodied life itself are an error in perception that can be corrected. There is only one true reality, but it appears as many to the unenlightened mind. This reality is unchanging and constant. Anything that changes, therefore, must

be unreal. Since there is only one reality, all difference, as we perceive it in our worldly experience, simply does not exist. If we have a favorite flavor of ice cream or color of the rainbow it is simply an error of judgment. No perceived differences are real. All human suffering comes from this error of

perception.

For Vedantins, like Classical yogis, this embodied life is a problem to be solved. And the Vedantins, too, have a solution. One of the primary strategies for overcoming erroneous thinking is referred to as *neti, neti* (not this, not this). The practice is to repeat phrases like “I am

not my body, for my body changes,” “I am not my mind, for my mind changes,” “I am not my emotions, for my emotions change.” Disciplined application of this approach is designed to bring true knowledge that will dispel the error in thought. Once the seeker acquires true knowledge, he or she becomes

enlightened. An enlightened one may continue to inhabit the body but will have the awareness that the body, thoughts, and everything seen are just illusions. If you are in a hatha yoga class with an Advaita Vedanta influence you may hear phrases like “you are not your body” or “you are not your

thoughts.”

Tantra

Sometime around the fifth or sixth century B.C.E. there was another revolution in Indian philosophical thought regarding the nature of the universe and our relationship to it. It was a radical shift that gave rise to a body of texts, oral

traditions, and practices known by the name *Tantra*, meaning “loom” or “weave” (also called *agama*, meaning “testimony”).

Rather than join the argument between Classical and Advaita Vedanta yoga concerning the nature of matter and spirit, the Tantras transmuted it by agreeing

with both sides and adding a new twist. Like Classical yogis, the Tantras affirmed the existence of spirit and matter; however, neither was granted supremacy. Like Advaita Vedantans, they affirmed the supreme unity of all reality. How could this be? How could both of the previously dominant philosophies be true at the same time?

Tantric philosophers resolved the issue with a masterful weaving together of these two great teachings. In essence they chose radical acceptance of all reality, both spiritual and material. The physical universe is explained as a diverse manifestation of the one supreme reality of divinity. The grounding

matrix of physical reality (*prakriti* to Classical yogis) is the Vedantic supreme self. The world we live in is the manifestation of infinite forms of this supreme consciousness.

This was an incredible shift in the prevailing views, which considered the physical body as a problem to be solved and required self-denial and

intense discipline of the physical body in order to either rise above it (Classical) or realize it as illusion (Advaita Vedanta). In bold contrast, the followers of Tantric philosophy considered the body as a manifestation of divinity itself, worthy of celebration and honor, rather than the result of a mistake or failure from a

previous lifetime. This viewpoint was nothing less than a radical acceptance of the body and all of life as divinity incarnate. Suddenly there was nothing to renounce and no failed past life causing one's current birth, only the choice of living fully in the reality one has received as a divine gift.

In contrast to the

Classical and Advaita Vedanta adherents who renounced the world as inferior or illusion, the followers of this new path were primarily lay people. They were heads of households and businessmen living in the everyday world, earning their living and paying their bills. Tantric scholar Douglas Brooks has

coined the term *rajanakas* to refer to this group. The term *rajanaka* means “sovereign over one’s own life”; it indicates that these yogis used their practice to gain mastery over all aspects of their lives while still living in the secular world. The modern day yoga school is based on the Rajanaka Tantra tradition and draws upon

the rich Tantric philosophy without the use of ancient Tantric ritual.

Eight Limbs of Classical Yoga

As outlined earlier, the Classical yoga viewpoint follows a strict interpretation of the *Yoga Sutras*—the culmination of a long

development of the science of yoga that set forth a very specific path to enlightenment. There are eight component stages, collectively referred to as *Ashtanga yoga* (*ashta*, “eight” and *anga* “limb”), the eight-limbed path to mystical union. The stages begin with a set of ethical codes and

progress through
physical postures,
breathing exercises,
and mental practices,
culminating in the
highest stage of
absorption in the
absolute.

Here is a description
of the eight limbs:

1. *Yama*. Five virtues,
or restraints, that

govern our
relationships with
others and the world:
ahimsa (noninjury),
satya (truthfulness),
asteya (nonstealing),
brahmacharya
(Godlike conduct),
and *aparigraha*
(nonclinging).

2. *Niyama.* Five
observances of one's
own physical

appearance, actions,
words, and thoughts
that govern our
relationship with
ourselves: *shauca*
(purity or cleanliness),
santosha
(contentment), *tapas*
(heat, burning desire
for reunion with God),
svadyaya (self-study
or self-inquiry) and
isvara pranidhana

(devotion or surrender to the Lord, “thy will be done”).

3. *Asana*. Postures for creating firmness of body, steadiness of intelligence, and benevolence of spirit. The physical practice most familiar to Westerners as yoga.

4. *Pranayama*. A set of

breathing exercises designed to help the yogi master the life force.

5. *Pratyahara.*

Withdrawal of the senses, mind, and consciousness from the outside world; focus inward on the self.

6. *Dharana.* Focused

concentration. With the body tempered by asanas, the mind refined by the fire of *pranayama*, and the senses under control using *pratyahara*, the student reaches this sixth stage.

7. *Dhyana*. Meditation. Withdrawing the consciousness into the soul.

8. *Samadhi*. Ecstasy. Merging with the divine. Self-realization. One experiences consciousness, truth, and unutterable joy. One must experience samadhi in order to understand it, because it is beyond the mind.

The system of Classical

yoga based on the *Yoga Sutras* has undoubtedly been the most common style of yoga taught in the West. It holds a strong appeal for students who want a well-defined, stepwise approach to their spiritual advancement.

Needless to say, this

fundamental shift toward Tantric thought affected the yogic practices of the day and continues to highlight the differences in the prevailing hatha yoga systems in the West. If you enter a yoga class based on Rajanaka Tantra philosophy you will likely hear phrases like “open to grace,” “your body is a divine temple” and “shine

out from your heart and express the divinity within you.”

Paths of Yoga

Just as there are distinct philosophies and interpretations of the scriptures in world religions, different philosophies have formed in the world of yoga. Accordingly, the living

science of yoga has been organized into many different paths or approaches over the centuries. It is no surprise that human beings, with so much diversity of thought and feeling, would find so many paths to their spiritual development in the realm of yoga. Yet, like many different paths to the top of the same

mountain, all paths lead to the same goal. Many people find that, as they progress through their lives, more than one path speaks to their spiritual needs. The best yoga paths for you are simply the ones that appeal most to your heart.

There are a number of recognized paths of yoga, of which six have gained

prominence in the Hindu culture of India: *bhakti*, *jnana*, *karma*, *raja*, *mantra*, and *hatha*.

Bhakti yoga is the yoga of devotion. It emphasizes the opening of the heart to divine love, the union of lover (the yogi) and beloved (the divine). This devotional love is often translated into song or chanting, with ecstatic

repetition of the names of the beloved, in gatherings called *kirtans*. One of the most popular kirtan artists in the United States today is Krishna Das, who is a bhakti yoga practitioner.

Jnana yoga is the yoga of wisdom. *Jnana* means “knowledge.” This is a path of self-realization through the exercise of discerning the real from

the unreal or illusory. It is a practice of discriminating between the products of nature and the transcendental Self, until the true Self is realized in the moment of liberation. This is a strictly nondualistic (*Advaita Vedanta*) path that requires the seeker to separate the real from the unreal, the Self from the

non-Self. Since the mind is considered part of the unreal, one must use the mind to outwit the mind. The principle techniques of this path are meditation and contemplation.

Karma yoga is the yoga of selfless action. *Karma* means “action.” The karma yogi makes all actions an offering to God, with no thought of

personal gain. Through serving others one is selflessly serving God. Mother Theresa and Mahatma Gandhi are examples of karma yoga practitioners.

Raja yoga is the “royal” yoga. *Raj* means “king,” and raja yoga seeks to reveal the king within each of us that is normally hidden by our everyday

actions and concealed by the workings of the mind. Raja yoga is a Classical yoga path most often associated with Ashtanga, the eight-limbed path of Patanjali. For the raja yogi the *Sutras* serve as an instruction manual to one's own experience of reality.

Mantra yoga is the yoga of sound. The word

mantra comes from the root *man*, “to think” and the suffix *tra*, “suggesting instrumentality.” So a mantra is a thought or intention expressed as sound. A mantra is a sacred utterance or sound charged with psychospiritual power. Yogis use mantras to achieve deep states of meditation and to invoke

specific states of consciousness, and they believe that a mantra expressing a particular aspect of the divine will help to awaken that aspect of their own consciousness. For instance, a mantra to Ganesha, the remover of obstacles, is used to help awaken that part of our personalities that can

overcome the obstacles in our lives. The most recognized and important mantra is the sound OM (see [page 23](#)).

Hatha yoga is called the forceful yoga and is defined in previous sections. There are many schools of hatha yoga, each rooted in one of the major philosophical traditions mentioned

earlier (Classical, Advaita Vedanta, or Tantra). Many styles of hatha yoga have become popular in the West ranging from healing therapy to vigorous athletic flow. Some schools work with detailed physical alignment while others focus only on the inner experience. You may practice yoga in air-conditioned comfort or in

temperatures of 100-plus degrees Fahrenheit (38+ °C). There is no shortage of variety and you are sure to find a style that agrees with you. Several styles of hatha yoga are listed in the resources section at the end of the book with contact information including websites where you can go to learn more about most of these

styles.

Energetic Anatomy: The Chakras

The practices of yoga are designed to deal with our bodies on more than just a physical level. To the yogi the physical body is a manifestation, a reflection, of the astral or energy body. This body of energy has its own anatomy,

based on seven major energy vortices called *chakras*. The word *chakra* means wheel or disk. The chakras line up along a central energy channel, or *nadi*, which runs from the base of the spine through the top of the head. It is called the *sushumna*. The sushumna is the energy body's primary pathway for the life force

(*kundalini*). The chakras are nodes of connection along this pathway where other energy channels intersect. The goal of classical yoga is to awaken the kundalini energy that lies dormant at the base of the spine and make it rise to the highest energy vortex at the crown of the head. The Tantric approach is to

stir one's awareness of that divine energy which is already awake. The yogi who can achieve and maintain this state is considered enlightened.

There are approximately 72,000 nadis in the energy body that channel energy. Three are primary, including the central sushumna and two others on either side. The left-

side channel is called the *ida*. Its qualities are cool, soft, reflective, and sensitive, like the moon. The right-side channel is called the *pingala* and is associated with heat, activity, and strength, like the sun. The balance of energy flow on these two sides affects the sensations of heat and cold in the physical body.

These two channels originate in the sushumna, near the base of the spine (in an energy vortex, or bulb, called a *kanda*), and they correspond to the first chakra, *muladhara*. They spiral up the sushumna, crisscrossing at each of the six higher chakras.

The chakras can be visualized from the front of

the body as lotus flowers with the roots in the back. As the life force, or *prana*, moves through the system, it makes the chakras spin. The health of this system of energy flow depends on the chakras spinning at a proper speed. If the chakras spin too slowly, too weakly, or too fast, this creates a damming

effect for the energy flow, and the system becomes imbalanced, which can manifest as emotional and physical illness.

Each chakra has a physical location in the body and is associated with physical, emotional, and energetic characteristics.

Additionally, each chakra is associated with basic

human rights and how we feel physically and energetically. For instance, if a child knows that he is loved, honored, and respected by his parents, he can develop a healthy sense of security. As a result the functioning of his muladhara chakra, which is associated with security, is enhanced.

The chakras can serve

as a type of energetic health monitor for the student of yoga. As we perform the physical practice of hatha yoga we increase the health, awareness, and energy flow to each section of our bodies. If a particular section of our body is functioning at optimal levels energetically, the chakra associated with

that section will also function optimally. Therefore, a hatha yoga practice can be designed to increase a student's self-esteem by strengthening the "band of self esteem," the region of the manipura chakra (the waistline).

Energy Gates: The Bandhas

Bandhas are a series of energy gates in the subtle energy body that regulate the flow of psychosomatic energy. The word *bandha* means lock, or constriction. You can think of the bandhas like the one-way valves in your circulatory system. These valves allow blood to flow in one direction as the heart pumps but not to

reverse its flow on the upstroke, ensuring proper direction of blood flow. The bandhas direct the life force in a similar way.

Yoga practitioners learn to tone certain sets of muscles in order to provide a lock, or closure, that holds psychosomatic energy and moves it powerfully through the subtle energy channels.

This generates a psychic heat in the subtle body that helps to stimulate the awakening of the kundalini energy.

There are three primary bandhas in the body:

Mulabandha—
the root lock
—is located
at the base
of the spine.

It stops the downward flow of life force, *apana*, so that it can be equalized with the upward flow, *prana*. The physical location of mulabandha is the

perineum
(the soft
tissue
between the
anus and the
genitals).

Mulabandha
comes as
you draw
energy
through the
muscles of
the perineum

toward a
central point,
creating an
energetic lift
through the
core of the
body. It is
often difficult
for beginners
to access
these
muscles until
they have

increased
their body
awareness in
this area.
Such
awareness
can be
increased by
engaging the
pelvic floor
muscles as
you would to
stop the flow

of urination.
With
heightened
awareness
mulabandha
can be
practiced by
drawing
energy
through the
muscles of
the perineum
toward a

central point,
creating an
energetic lift
through the
core of the
body.

Uddiyana bandha.

Uddiyana
means “flying
upward.” This
“gate” is
located in the

low
abdomen.
Uddiyana
bandha is
performed by
exhaling fully
and drawing
the lower
abdomen in
and up while
simultaneously
lifting the
diaphragm. It

is important
not to
engage this
bandha after
eating or
during deep
inhalation, as
it puts
pressure on
the stomach,
lungs, and
other internal
organs. This

bandha is
intended to
create further
lift for the
upward flow
of prana in
the
sushumna.

**Jalandhara
bandha—**
chin or throat
lock—is
located at the

top of the
throat. This
lock stops
prana flow
from leaking
upward out of
the torso and
downward
from the
head into the
t o r s o . *Jala*
means “net,”
“web,” or

“mesh.” This
lock is
performed as
follows:

While
lengthening
your neck,
curl your
head back
initiating the
movement
from the
palate as if

drinking
sweet nectar.
Keeping your
neck
extending
upward,
release your
head forward
like the bow
of a swan,
taking the top
of your throat
back and up

as if your
throat were
smiling from
ear to ear.
Continue the
release of
your chin
toward your
chest while
taking the top
of the throat
back and up.

Performed together, these bandhas create an energy container between the floor of the pelvis and the throat chakra. The psychic heat generated helps to mobilize the upward rising of the kundalini energy and clear blockages in the central energy channel.

When you attend a hatha yoga class you may

be taught how to use the bandhas by the specific names referred above. Or you may not hear the word bandha mentioned at all. Some schools of hatha yoga teach bandhas most of the time, while others teach them sparingly but some schools use alignment principles to create the same effect.

This book follows the

latter approach for teaching asanas. *Mulabandha* is engaged by the following sequence of instructions which are common to many asanas in this book—move your thighs back; widen your pelvic floor; keeping that action, tuck your tailbone down and under; and extend from your low belly up through the top of your

head. *Uddiyana bandha* is engaged by the following instructions—draw the flesh below your navel in and up (take the sides of your waistline back) and extend from your low belly up through the top of your head. Techniques for *jalandhara bandha* are not explored in this book.

Using Drishtis

A *drishti* is a gaze, or a point of focus. Drishtis are included for each pose in chapters 2 through 10 of this book as a way to direct your focus when you practice. Dristhis are actually intended to direct your “inner” focus more than your physical sight, even though the directions may be to fix your gaze on an external object or a

point on your body, such as the floor, the tip of your nose, or your navel. Dristhis are designed to help you practice your yoga with awareness and without being distracted by your surroundings. Use them to practice the postures in this book if you find them helpful.

Getting the Most From

Your Yoga Practice

Now that you have been exposed to some of the history and philosophy of yoga, let's introduce some of the basic elements to consider in your yoga practice. Simple choices you make about clothing, time, your place of practice, and the use of props can make all the difference in your

enjoyment and make the time you spend practicing yoga most effective. Learning how to use your breath during yoga is highly important to enhance your practice and make your practice the best it can be for you. You will likely find that meditation is a wonderful complement to your practice of yoga and an

equally powerful stand-alone practice that you will enjoy for years to come. All of these practices will be introduced in the sections that follow so that your yoga toolbox will be well stocked when you begin your practice of hatha yoga.

Yogic Breathing

Our breath is synonymous

with our life. Breathing is so natural and automatic that most people never even notice that they are breathing unless it is excited or restricted in some way. Life enters us with our first inhalation and leaves with our final exhalation. It is truly one with our life force. The animating life force of the breath can be thought of

as the play of a divine goddess, called *Shakti*. Shakti is the creative energy of the divine that animates everything in the universe. In essence we are always being breathed by this divine energy. When we inhale the Shakti is exhaling into us, and when we exhale it is her inhale.

For the yogi the breath

serves as an extension of the prana, or life force, as it moves in the body. It is the physical manifestation of the natural flow of this energy. It is the medium through which we express the attitude in our hearts and translate it into the outer body. By using the breath we increase our sensitivity to the flow of energy, and with that

increased sensitivity we are closer to realization of our own divine nature. The breath has the capacity to open the body and allow our energy to flow more freely in our yoga practice. Awareness of breath brings a mindful, sacred quality to an asana practice.

One of the first lessons to learn in the practice of

yoga is proper use of the breath. Yoga is a practice of connecting to the deep spirit within each of us. It is the practice of tuning in to the essence of our hearts, all of our dreams and desires, and expressing them joyfully through our physical bodies. The breath is the medium through which we make that connection.

The Natural Breath

When we are born, our breath is full, flowing, and uninhibited. Our bodies and minds are designed for the fullest expression of the breath. We don't have to think in order to breathe in that way. This type of breath just happens with no conscious effort on our parts. This has been

referred to as “the natural breath” for which there are several key characteristics:

1. The pelvic floor expands and descends on inhalation and contracts and lifts on exhalation.
2. The collarbone lifts and rolls upward on inhalation and descends

on exhalation.

3. The upper arms externally rotate on inhalation and internally rotate on exhalation.

You can see this process most clearly in the breathing of a baby, whose belly will rise and fall with each breath. Babies seem to breathe with their whole bodies, as

if every part expands and contracts with the movement of the breath. You can observe your own diaphragmatic breathing by lying on your back and noticing the natural rise and fall of your belly with the breath.

The natural breath wants to flow in us as the fullest possible expression of the Shakti energy.

However, if mental or emotional traumas are introduced we may learn different breathing habits that restrict this natural flow. For instance, when we are threatened or upset our whole body tightens we enter a state commonly referred to as the fight-or-flight response. In such a state we are reduced to our

basic survival instincts—the abdomen tightens, restricting diaphragmatic breathing, and quick, shallow chest breathing results. This state might be healthy for a person who has stepped in front of a bus. However, chronic exposure to circumstances that elicit the fight-or-flight response can cause a person to

form long-term restricted breathing habits. The emotional stresses of a fast-paced lifestyle can cause a person to lose touch with the fullness of his or her breath. It is not uncommon for Westerners to use only a small percentage of our breathing capacity. Returning to an awareness of our natural

breath can help us to recover our healthy breathing patterns.

Uninhibited breathing creates the natural rise and fall of the belly because of the movement of the diaphragm, the main muscle responsible for breathing. The torso of our bodies is divided into two main cavities—the thoracic, or chest cavity,

and the abdominal cavity. At the bottom of our chest cavity we have a muscular membrane called the diaphragm, which completely separates these two cavities. Like the head of a drum stretched across the bottom of our rib cage, the outline of the diaphragm is roughly the outline along the base of the ribs. It

attaches to the bottom of the sternum (the center chest, where the ribs attach) and follows the lowest outline of the ribs all the way back to the lumbar spine, where it attaches via tendinous tissues called crura. There are three openings in the “drum head” of the diaphragm to allow descending and

ascending blood to flow and food to pass. The heart rests just above the diaphragm, and the digestive organs are just below it. The lower surfaces of the lungs are attached to the upper surface of the diaphragm.

As the diaphragm moves through a large range of motion it substantially changes the

volume of the thoracic cavity. The muscles of the rib cage and upper chest also change thoracic volume, although with much less efficiency than the diaphragm.

When we breathe naturally the diaphragm moves down to create a vacuum in the chest cavity that draws the air into the lungs. Because the

downward movement of the diaphragm displaces the organs of the abdomen, the belly naturally distends on inhalation and retracts on exhalation as in the natural breath. You can increase your awareness of your diaphragm by placing a small, soft weight, such as a bag of rice or beans, on your

abdomen between your ribs and your navel. As you inhale, notice the work that the diaphragm must do to lift the extra weight. As you exhale, let your belly gently fall under the weight. Simply increasing your awareness of your natural breath, without trying to manipulate or control your breathing, can bring you

to a state of peace and relaxation.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

A yogic practice that consciously uses the diaphragm with the breath is called *diaphragmatic* breathing. The following exercise is a remedial form of diaphragma-tic breathing that helps to

counter those problems that interfere with the natural breath.

Begin the exercise in a reclining position with your spine resting on a stack of blankets. Fold three firm-weave blankets (Mexican blankets work well) lengthwise to a width just less than the width of your shoulders and to a length just longer than the

distance from your navel to the top of your head. Stack two of the blankets one on top of the other. Stack the third blanket crosswise to the other two at one end of the stack. Sit on the floor in front of the stack, and lie back with your head resting on the third blanket such that your head is slightly elevated. From this

position you can easily practice breathing into the three regions of your torso, as follows:

Lower belly:

Place your hands on your low belly, just above the navel, with the tips of

your middle
fingers
touching.

Breath with
your
diaphragm so
that your
belly rises
into your
hands and
your
fingertips
separate

slightly. Also
allow the
breath to fill
the side and
back belly
region so
that there is
a full
expansion in
all directions.
As you
exhale allow
the lower

torso to
contract so
that your
fingers come
back into
contact.

Practice
several
breaths in
and out of
the low-belly
region of
your torso.

Mid-chest:

Place your hands on the sides of your rib cage and apply a slight inward pressure to your ribs. As you inhale, in addition to lifting the low belly,

consciously
expand the
sides of your
rib cage to
make more
room for the
breath.

Notice how
the ribs both
expand into
your hands
and separate
slightly from

each other.
Continue this
breathing
practice for
several
breaths.

**Upper
chest:** Place
your hands
on your
upper chest
with your
index fingers

resting on
your
collarbones.
Breathe into
your hands
by filling your
upper chest
with your
breath and
notice the
expansion
upward into
your hands.

You will
notice the
least amount
of movement
into this
region even
as the
amount of
effort is
substantially
greater.

Full Yogic Breathing

The next step in a yogic breathing practice is to learn *full yogic breathing*.

This technique also uses all three areas of the torso to allow the fullest breath possible with two significant changes from diaphragmatic breathing:

- 1) With full yogic breathing as you inhale, you tone the muscles of your low abdomen so that

your torso expands to the side with your breath rather than having your belly rise; 2) on exhalation, you keep your ribs expanded (as if you are inhaling).

To practice full yogic breathing in the reclining position repeat the three steps described for diaphragmatic breathing within the duration of a

single breath. On inhalation keep the low belly toned so that your belly does not rise. As you exhale, keep your chest expanded and full and empty the air from top to bottom. Keep your breath smooth and steady, and attempt to make the duration of the inhalation and exhalation the same. You may discontinue

placing your hands on your torso once you have learned the technique. Once you've mastered this breathing in the reclining position, you may attempt it in a sitting position. For this practice, keep your pelvis heavy on inhalation as you breathe into all three torso regions successively. On exhalation, keep your ribs

lifted and expanded.

Other Breathing Techniques

Over the centuries yogis have understood the power of the breath to alter states of consciousness and have developed breathing techniques to create a desired state. These techniques of the breath

are called *pranayama*.

It is interesting to consider the use and interpretation of these breathing techniques from the perspective of the major yogic schools. Some Classical yogis translate *pranayama* as “breath control,” a combination of the Sanskrit terms *prana*, or life force (breath), and

yama, “control” or
“restriction.” This
interpretation makes
sense from the Classical
perspective that the body
is inferior to spirit and is to
be dominated or forced
into submission so that we
can realize our true
nature. In another
interpretation the body
and the breath are seen
as manifestations of

divinity. Accordingly, pranayama is interpreted as *prana* and *ayama*, which means “noncontrol.” From this perspective the techniques are seen as a way of skillfully participating with the breath, or dancing with the divine goddess Shakti.

There are a wide variety of breathing techniques that have been developed,

depending on the desired state the yogi wishes to attain. Two of the most common pranayamas are described below.

Ujjayi Breathing *Ujjayi*, which means “victoriously uprising,” is the most common yogic breathing technique. You will hear the sound of *ujjayi* breathing in almost any yoga class. It is created

by toning the epiglottis to intentionally create a sound at the back of your throat. The sound has been compared to the whispered sound of *haaa* in the back of your throat as you breathe. It creates a direct feedback that yogis use to monitor the flow of their breath. The quality of your breath is directly related to your

state of mind, so when you are aware of your breath you can be aware of your inner state.

To practice *ujjayi* breathing take a deep inhalation followed by a deep exhalation, to open yourself up to receive the breath. Inhale through your nose as you slightly constrict the muscles in the back of your throat to

create a whispering sound. Exhale through your nose creating the same sound. Keep the flow of your breath even and smooth from the beginning to the end of each inhalation-exhalation cycle. Generally we inhale and exhale faster at the beginning of the cycle, and our breath tapers off at the end. During *ujjayi*,

keep the same rate of breath flowing at all times, from start to stop. This requires that you make the second half of each inhale or exhale stronger to balance the flow. Fill yourself with the breath from bottom to top as in full yogic breathing, creating lift in the spine and torso, and keep the lift as you exhale. Breathe

smoothly and steadily, making your inhalation and exhalation even in duration. This type of breathing is very soothing to your nervous system and promotes calmness and peace of mind.

Alternate Nostril Breathing This type of yogic breathing is called *nadi shodhana*. As described earlier the word

nadi means “energy channel” and *shodhana* means “cleansing.” Nadi shodhana breath is designed to cleanse the nadis. You will recall that there are three main channels in the body for prana: one central (sushumna), one right (pingala), and one left (ida). Usually there is a difference in the energy

flow between the right and left channels that shifts back and forth during the day. You can notice this by the difference between your left and right nostrils as you breathe. One side will be dominant for a while, and then the pattern will reverse. The alternating breath of nadi shodhana both cleanses and balances the flow

between ida and pingala.

Alternate nostril breathing requires a little technique for regulating the breath through one nostril at a time. To experience this technique hold out your right-hand palm, face up. Curl your index and middle fingers to touch the fleshy part of your palm at the base of your thumb. Keep your

thumb extended and free (figure 1.1a). You will use your thumb to close off your right nostril and your other two fingers to close off your left nostril.

The technique for nadi shodhana is as follows:

1 Put your right hand into the form just described. Begin with a deep inhalation.



Figure 1.1a

2 Close your left nostril with your ring finger and exhale fully through your right nostril (**figure 1.1b**).



Figure 1.1b

3 Inhale fully through your right nostril, close your right nostril (using your thumb) as well,

and pause (**figure 1. 1c**).



Figure 1.1 c

4 Open your left nostril, exhale fully through the left side, and pause

(figure 1.1d).



Figure 1.1d

5 Inhale fully through your left nostril, close

your left nostril as well, and pause. Open your right nostril and exhale fully through the right side.

6 Repeat this pattern for a few minutes, then finish with inhalation through your right nostril and exhalation through both nostrils. Return to natural breathing.

What to Wear

When you practice hatha yoga the most important thing about clothing is that it be comfortable and functional. Your clothing should not restrict your movements and should be appropriate for the temperature of the room in which you practice. It is essential to remove socks and shoes when practicing

yoga so that your feet will stick to your yoga mat (see the next section “How to Use Props”) and your feet and toes will be able to expand.

For public yoga classes that use alignment principles it is important to wear clothing that allows your teacher to see your alignment. For instance, long, baggy pants do not

allow the teacher to see if your leg muscles are properly engaged or if your knees are properly aligned. And if you are trying to learn to properly engage your shoulder blades on your back you will need visibility there. For these classes tights and leotards are recommended for women, shorts and tank tops for

men. For classes that do not emphasize alignment, you can have fun wearing the latest in yoga apparel to class. For restorative and gentle classes the more comfortable you are, the better. In general, your clothing should support your practice, be comfortable, and be fun.

How to Use Props

The most important piece of equipment you will need to start your yoga practice is a good yoga mat. A yoga mat provides a nonslip surface that will keep you steady as you move into and out of various postures. There are many different types of mats available. It is best to choose a good-quality mat that supports your

practice. The thinnest mats (about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick) are rubberized, colorful, and provide a good nonslip surface; however, these mats do not provide much cushion for bony protrusions when you are doing floor exercises. The thickest mats are called *transformer mats*. These mats provide excellent cushion and nonslip

characteristics though they are quite heavy and expensive. It is a good idea to use the mats your yoga studio provides for a while until you decide what type is best suited for you.

There is a variety of other props that will support your practice as well. A good yoga blanket is a must for the beginning

student. Most studios provide blankets so that you do not have to purchase your own. The best blankets are of the Mexican close-weave variety. These fold with crisp, clean edges and provide the most stable support. Synthetic, loose-weave blankets or towels do not provide stable support.

Yoga blocks, straps, bolsters, sandbags, and eye pillows are also useful props when called for by your teacher or in the asana descriptions. Most studios provide all of the props for no charge except mats, which can usually be rented for a small fee per class. Eye pillows are usually purchased separately.

Yoga blankets placed under your hips provide extra cushion and lift to help you keep your low back from rounding when you're sitting on the floor. Straps provide extra reach when you are extending your legs and reaching for your toes as well as support for some sitting and partner postures. Yoga blocks can be

placed under your hands in side and forward bends until you can reach the floor without them. Blocks can also be squeezed between your thighs in some postures to teach proper engagement of the legs. Sandbags provide weight for extra grounding for floor exercises. They can encourage relaxation when placed on your body

because they give a safe, stable pressure. Eye pillows are very calming for restorative postures and final relaxation. They provide a gentle, even pressure on your eyelids.

Where to Practice

The great thing about your yoga practice is that it is truly portable. You may decide to practice yoga at

places and times other than just public classes. If you are away from home, and depending on the level of your practice, you may decide to practice in an airport during a layover (headstands are great conversation starters), in a hotel room (after moving the furniture), or at work in a vacant conference room.

You may want to create

a special space in your home for your practice. A room with a hardwood floor or smooth tile is ideal. A low-pile carpet can also make a good surface for yoga practice if you use a good yoga mat to help you avoid slipping. Yoga mats are now widely available in locations ranging from yoga studios to grocery stores.

When to Practice

The most important aspect of when you choose to practice is that you are regular and consistent in your practice. The more you practice yoga the more you will progress. Allow yourself one or two days off per week to give your body time to recover, as needed. If you are menstruating or ill be

willing to take a few days off for that as well. In general it is best to commit to practicing daily for a set amount of time, even if you cannot practice at the same time each day. Choose a time that fits your schedule when you will not be distracted by other things. Figure out how much time you can give to your yoga

practice each day. Even if you practice as little as 15 to 20 minutes a day you will notice improvements in your strength and flexibility and in the way you feel. As you progress you can add to your practice time in preparation for a full-length public class (typically 90 minutes long).

If you practice in the morning you may notice that your mind is keen but your body is a little sluggish. In the late afternoon or early evening your body is usually flexible but your mind may be tired and lacking focus. The body and mind are usually at their peak in the late morning and early afternoon, so those are

optimal times for a full asana practice. There are many studios and class times available in most cities and towns, so you should be able to find a time that works for you.

You should not practice yoga when you have a fever. Yoga raises the body temperature and competes for the energy your body needs to

recover. Likewise, do not practice if you are weak from cold or flu, except to do restorative postures. Women should avoid doing inversions such as headstand or shoulder stand when they are menstruating. This is because the healthy downward flow of the menses is disrupted if a woman inverts during this

time. A woman can substitute a supported Downward-Facing Dog or Legs-Up-the-Wall pose in this case.

Always seek the advice of your physician and your yoga instructor about practicing if you are ill or injured. A yoga instructor who is skilled in the art of yoga therapy can help you greatly if you are injured.

But be sure that your teacher has been properly trained in yoga therapy. A school of hatha yoga that is respected for yoga therapy is Iyengar Yoga.

When you are ready to attend public yoga classes, it is recommended that you attend at least twice weekly in order to progress in your practice.

This book provides excellent training to prepare you for your first class and can remain an outstanding reference for you as you progress in public classes and deepen your own home practice.

What and When to Eat

There are a few general guidelines to follow for eating before yoga

practice, such as finish meals three to four hours before an intense practice. It is best if the digestive process is complete before you practice yoga, because digestive muscles compete with other body muscles for blood after you eat. If you have low blood sugar or have little time between yoga sessions for a meal

you can supplement with fruit, energy bars, or yogurt anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes before class. Protein smoothies also make an excellent quick meal when time is short, because liquids are more easily digested.

For some schools of hatha yoga the issue of vegetarianism is a serious concern, while for others it

hardly receives mention. Disagreements on the morality of what we eat can result in heated confrontations within and outside of the yoga community. For most of us the way we eat is a deeply personal issue. For many it is also an issue of how we treat the other beings on our planet.

Arguments against a

diet including meat are usually based upon the concept of *ahimsa* from Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. There are many levels of interpretation of this principle. Some define *ahimsa* as nonviolence and take the stance that taking any form of life to further your own is a violent act. Some yoga practitioners go so far as

to wear masks and sweep the ground in front of them to avoid taking the lives of insects.

Others interpret ahimsa as noninjury and view the world as inherently containing acts of violence, such as cutting the umbilical cord on a baby or defending your self or loved ones from attack. If violence cannot

be avoided in an engaged life, the injury it does can be skillfully managed. For this school of thought it is not the act itself that is important, it is the intent behind the act. The main measure of an act is whether or not it is *shri*, or life-affirming. For example, chemotherapy is a very violent act against the body, yet the intent is to

save the life of the patient.

For others the choice of how to eat is primarily a matter of health and happiness. Certain types of diet are healthier than others and directly affect the quality of your life. It is beyond the scope of this book to offer detailed dietary advice. Most people who practice yoga find that they are more

aware of how their bodies feel and how their diet affects their bodies. As we increase our sensitivity to the gift of our body we are likely to move naturally toward the best choice for ourselves.

Learning to Meditate

Meditation is
the basis for
all inner

work. It is the
direct naked
encounter
with our own
awareness
that shifts our
understanding
of who we
are and gives
us the power
to stand
firmly in our
own center.

No one else
can do this
for us. Only
meditation
can unlock
these doors.

Swami
Durgananda
(Sally
Kempton),
The Heart of
Meditation

Meditation is an important part of the journey inward. It is a gateway into your experience of your own inner nature of divinity. Many great yogis have followed the pathway of union with the self through meditation. A strong and supple body greatly enhances your experience of sitting meditation. Many

Westerners are not aware that the postures of hatha yoga were originally created to prepare the body for sitting meditation.

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* call for meditation, or *dhyana*, as the seventh stage of the eight-stage path to enlightenment. Once students have mastered the sixth stage (concentration, or

dharana), they may proceed to meditation. But almost everyone begins their meditation practice while they are still working to increase their ability to concentrate, so do not be discouraged as you observe your mind wandering. That is normal.

The dictionary defines meditation as a devotional exercise of contemplation.

The root Latin word for meditation, *meditari*, means “to think about or consider.” Any form of contemplation can be a meditation if you are focused clearly on the issue at hand. For instance, time you spend considering how you want to live and who you want to be in this life are excellent examples of

meditation. Even if you are confused about your course of action, meditation can connect you to your heart, where there is a deep knowing about the right choices. The more you meditate, the more you will learn to trust your own inner source of guidance.

It is not necessary to meditate if you practice

hatha yoga. Nor is it a requirement to practice yoga if you want to meditate, but combining the two practices can enhance your experience of both.

Ways to Meditate

There are many ways to meditate, just as there are many styles of yoga. The best way to determine the

best style of meditation for yourself is simply to try several styles and see which one says yes to your heart.

The first stage of meditation is to focus clearly on a specific object or sensation with your eyes open or closed. You can repeat a word or phrase, visualize a place, object, or deity, or simply

tune in to your breath and observe it slowly coming in and going out.

Sound meditation usually involves the use of a mantra to draw you into deep states of awareness, as described in the “Paths of Yoga” section of this chapter. A mantra is a sacred utterance or sound charged with psychospiritual power. It is

usually a word or phrase honoring a particular deity or aspect of the divine. Yogis use mantras to achieve deep states of meditation and to invoke specific states of consciousness, and they believe that a mantra expressing a particular aspect of the divine will help to awaken that aspect of their own

consciousness. A mantra is used to help awaken that part of our personalities that can overcome the obstacles in our lives. The most recognized and important mantra is the sound *OM*. Silently repeating your chosen mantra as you sit in meditation can be very powerful.

The *OM* was considered

the single most important sound in chanting of the *Vedas*. The symbol for *OM*, illustrated in [figure 1.2](#), represents all the states of human consciousness and is interpreted as follows. The bottom curve represents the dream state, the upper curve represents the waking state, and the middle curve, or swirl, to

the right represents the deep, dreamless sleep state. The crescent shape (top right) represents the veil of illusion, or *maya*, and the dot represents the transcendental state.



Figure 1.2 Symbol for OM

For some people, visualization meditation may be more effective. You can visualize your chosen deity—a god or goddess or a peaceful nature scene, such as a flower or a beautiful coastline. The image you choose should elicit feelings of deep contentment for you.

Another popular

meditation technique is simply to focus on your breath. There is no attempt to control or change the breath. Just focus on all aspects of your breathing—how your chest lifts and your abdomen expands and how the air feels moving through your nostrils. There is no judgment, no good or bad aspect of the

breath, just awareness. The breath is a manifestation of the divine energy that animates your body. This meditation helps bring to consciousness the awareness that you are being breathed by that divinity.

Heart-centered meditation involves focusing on your heart

center and the feelings and sensations that arise there. Focusing on our hearts takes us deeply into our core awareness and our most profound feelings of love and joy. You can visualize the breath moving directly into your heart center to begin to connect with these feelings.

Where to Meditate

You must
have a room,
or a certain
hour or so a
day, where
you don't
know what
was in the
newspapers
that morning,
you don't

know who
your friends
are, you
don't know
what you
owe
anybody, you
don't know
what
anybody
owes you.
This is a
place where

you can
simply
experience
and bring
forth what
you are and
what you
might be.
This is the
place of
creative
incubation.

Joseph
Campbell,
*The Power
of Myth*

The place you choose for your meditation is important. It is the way you honor both your meditation ritual and yourself. Select a sacred space to support your meditation practice in a

way that honors the things that have meaning for you. You may choose a space filled with light and fresh air or one that is cozy and warm. The most important thing is that your space helps to transport you to that sacred place within yourself.

Also, it is powerful to come back to the same place each time you sit for

meditation. Your continued practice will build the energy in your space, establishing a strong, peaceful vibration. The ideal space is a room with no other purpose (except possibly your hatha yoga practice). If it is not possible to set aside a whole room just for meditation, select a corner of a room that is free from

distraction.

It is a wonderful practice to create an altar in your meditation space. An altar can transform your meditation space, because it creates a sense of ritual. And ritual can take you right into your heart, because it serves to remind you of what is important. Your altar can be anything you want it to

be as long as it is something that matters to you. There are no rules, so be creative. Some items you might use on your altar are candles, incense, pictures of teachers or others you look up to, and pictures of deities or great beings. These items will uplift your senses and establish a pure energy. Flowers can

be an offering to your favorite deities or can simply invite your heart to open.

When to Meditate

The best times to meditate are just before sunrise and at sunset. These are the times when nature slows her activity, birds are quiet, and animals do not stir. Because we are

connected with the natural world our minds and bodies are also still at these times, yet we can remain alert. As often as possible, practice your meditation at the same time each day. Consistency builds a strong and useful meditation practice.

Your meditation practice can be an excellent

complement for your asana practice. If you begin or end your practice with 5 to 10 minutes of meditation you will find that both practices benefit. However you do it, it is recommended that you create a regular meditation practice. Even 5 to 10 minutes each day will show positive results in your state and clarity of

mind.

Positions for Meditation

The Classical position for meditation is sitting on the floor in a cross-legged position. The sitting positions are chosen because they allow the meditator to sit comfortably for relatively long periods. A common meditation asana that

allows for extended sitting (20 to 90 minutes) are the sage positions (siddhasana), see [page 176](#). If you are unable to sit in one of these positions, you can meditate sitting with good posture in a chair.



Proper alignment when you sit will help to make your experience more enjoyable and productive.

To practice meditation sitting, refer to the photographs and instructions in [chapter 9](#).

Begin your meditation by either practicing one of the techniques just described or a technique of your own choosing. It is a good idea to set a timer to let you know when your allotted time has passed to avoid the distraction of

watching the clock.

Mudras

A *mudra* is a hand gesture, an asana for the hands. Throughout history, hand gestures have been used by all civilizations and religions. The priests and priestesses of ancient Egypt used hand gestures to perform prayer rituals

5,000 years ago. People of many cultures have used them, including the Aborigines, Romans, Turks, Persians, Africans, Chinese, Gigians, Mayans, and Native Americans. Christians will recognize specific hand gestures in the portrayals of Jesus, though few know the significance of these mudras. The most

commonly recognized mudra is the “prayer” mudra, known to yogis as *anjali mudra*. Anjali means “offering”—this mudra can represent offering to one’s self in service or in gratitude. In India mudras became very important with the practices of yoga.

The word *mudra* means “seal,” because the mudras create an

impression in the subtle body like a letter sealed with a hot-wax imprint. The impressions are made in the energy body and, therefore, are used to control the flow of life energy in the body. This life energy, or prana, radiates from the fingertips. Each finger conducts a different vibrational energy, and

these finger postures bring the energies together in different combinations. Each combination completes an energy circuit in the body and mind, creating a calming effect that also stimulates various chakras. There are many combinations of finger postures to encourage different kinds of mental focus. Because

of the effect on the chakras, mudras may also be helpful in healing various medical conditions. Kundalini yoga and other modalities use mudras for this purpose.

These are some of the most commonly known yoga mudras:

Adi mudra:

Adi means

“first,” and
adi mudra is
the first
position in
which an
infant holds
its hands—
making a fist
with the
thumb tucked
inside. Adi
mudra is
used to

control
clavicular
(upper-chest)
breathing. It
stimulates
the deepest
recesses of
the brain,
that organ
which is most
closely
associated
with the

crown
chakra.

Abhaya

mudra: The
“gesture of
fearlessness”
for dispelling
fear in
others. This
mudra is
shared and
understood
equally by

Native
Americans,
Hindus,
Buddhists,
and the
Christian
painters of
the
Renaissance.
When you
raise your
right hand,
extending

your fingers
straight up
and holding
your palm
open, you
are showing
peaceful and
compassionate
intent. This
mudra
relates to the
anahata
(heart)

chakra.

Agni mudra:

Agni means “fire,” which in yoga is commonly associated with the digestive process. In agni mudra the thumb touches the

tip of the
middle finger;
the first,
third, and
fourth fingers
are extended
away from
the palm.
Agni mudra
improves
both
digestion and
intelligence,

and is good
for the
manipura
(abdominal)
chakra.

Apan

mudra: Also
known as the
“deer mudra”
because of
the antlerlike
pointing of
the index and

little fingers.
Apana refers
to the
cleansing
effect of
prana when it
flows down
and out of
the body. In
this mudra
the tip of the
thumb
contacts the

tips of both
the second
and third
fingers; the
first and
fourth fingers
point upward
like the
antlers of a
deer. It
promotes a
patient and
serene state

of mind.

Gyana

mudra: This mudra is accomplished by touching the tip of the thumb and index fingers together. The second, third, and fourth fingers are

extended
away from
the palm.
This is the
most popular
mudra for
meditation,
as it
promotes
calmness
and clarity of
mind.

Dhyana

mudra:

Dhyana

means

“meditation.”

The hands
are placed
palms up in
the lap, right
on top of left,
with the tips
of the thumbs
touching.

Some of

these mudras
are used with
the asanas in
chapter 9.

Using the Asanas in This Book

The remainder of this book provides a step-by-step guide for how to perform a wide array of yoga poses or *asanas*. Each chapter contains similar asanas

that are grouped according to type of posture, such as backbends, forward bends, balancing postures, and so forth. Each posture is listed by both English and Sanskrit names (when available) and most include a counterpose, which you may perform as a cool-down following the original

pose, and a drishti, which you may use as a point of focus. The physical and mental benefits as well as the contraindications are listed to help you understand the benefits of each pose and any necessary variations or precautions for performing certain poses.

Each posture is presented as a series of

photos with step-by-step instructions to help you get into and out of the pose. Many poses also include a gentle variation that can serve as a good starting point for beginners or that can provide an option for those with physical limitations. Finally, most asanas list variation postures that will provide greater challenge

as your practice progresses.

This book can be used as an excellent reference for your practice of yoga whether you are a beginning, intermediate, or advanced practitioner. Each posture will open up to you the more you practice it and you may find that you can come back to the same posture

again and again and learn
something new each time.
This book will serve as
your own personal guide
along your yoga
adventure. Enjoy the
journey.

chapter 2

Standing Postures

Standing postures are the most fundamental class of all asanas because they create the foundation for your practice by laying the groundwork for the more advanced postures. They help you increase power,

strength, and stability in the legs. In addition, they aid in proper digestion, circulation, mobility, and spatial awareness. During a series of standing postures the heart and lungs actively detox the blood. Following standing postures, the nervous system is better insulated, therefore leaving you feeling refreshed,

attentive, and settled.



Mountain

Tadasana

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Aligns the spine
- ▶ Tones the abdominal muscles and buttocks

- ▶ Opens the chest
- ▶ Improves posture
- ▶ Strengthens the arches, ankles, knees, and thighs

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Improves focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Reduces mild anxiety



Make sure your knees face directly ahead; adjust your feet slightly if necessary.

Hug your leg muscles to the bone on all sides by engaging the muscles from skin to muscle and muscle to bone; pull the muscles up from your feet into your pelvis.

1 Stand with your feet

parallel. Draw an imaginary line from the center of your ankle through the second toe of each foot and make those lines parallel to each other.

Lengthen the sides of your body, take your shoulders back, and bring the shoulder blades more onto your back.



2 Inhale and take the

**tops of your thighs back
so that your hips stick
out in back. Exhale and
balance the backward
action of your thighs by
lengthening from your
tailbone downward
through your feet. This
action moves your hip
flesh down and creates
a lifting action below
your navel. Inhale and
extend from your pelvis**

up through the top of your head, keeping your heart lifted and your chest open.

3 Stay in the pose for several full breaths and notice how you feel, then release.

Other Variations



Downward-Facing Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Child's Pose
(Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ At the floor
- ▶ Between your feet

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Relieves insomnia, menstrual and menopausal discomfort, and low back pain
- ▶ Strengthens the arms, legs, and torso
- ▶ Stretches the palms, chest, back,

hamstrings, calves,
and feet


- ▶ Energizes the body

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Improves focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind
- ▶ Relieves stress and mild anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Carpal tunnel syndrome
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Headache



Keep the inside creases of your elbows facing each other.

Line up the creases of your wrists so they are parallel with the front of your mat (or if not using a mat, with where your mat would be).

Walk your knees back slightly behind your hips.

1 Come to all fours, placing your hands directly under your shoulders. Spread your fingers evenly and root

**down into the floor
through all four corners
of your hands. Rooting
down means to extend
downward energetically
like a tree sending down
roots into the earth.
Inhale and draw
muscularly from your
hands up into your
shoulders. Keeping
your arms steadfast and
straight, exhale and**

draw your shoulder blades onto your back.

Keep your arms straight by anchoring your hands down and drawing the muscles up your arms from your wrists into your shoulders.

Separate your knees as wide apart as your ankles.

Root down firmly into the floor through your hands.

2 Maintaining the action of step 1, inhale, lift your hips, and lengthen

**back through your spine
and hips.**

**3 Straighten your legs
to come into the full
pose.**

Lengthen from your heart down through your arms and up to your tailbone.

Press your thigh bones back into your hamstrings.



Keeping the toes spreading, root from your tailbone down through your legs to bring your heels toward the floor.

**4 Hold for a few breaths.
Release and lower
yourself into Child's
Pose.**

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3 except keep your knees bent and your heels off the floor.



Other Variation



Extended Side-Angle

Utthita Parsvakonasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ At the floor

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the ankles, calves, knees, and thighs
- ▶ Relieves symptoms of sciatica
- ▶ Opens the hips and groin

- ▶ Increases lung capacity
- ▶ Alleviates symptoms of arthritis
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Improves digestion

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind

- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee injury
- ▶ Low blood pressure
(keep fingertips
upward, toward the
ceiling)



1 Stand in Tadasana
(see [page 28](#)).



2 Step your feet wide apart. Inhale and extend your arms out to the

side. Ideally your ankles should be under your wrists.



Engage your leg muscles to the bone and draw the muscles from the floor up into your pelvis.

Align your right heel with the arch of your left foot.

3 Turn your left foot in slightly and turn your right leg out directly to the side.

4 Exhale, bend your right knee to 90 degrees, and place your right fingertips on the outside edge of your right ankle. Place your left hand on your hip. Take your hips and thighs back, widen your

**sitting bones apart, and
widen the pelvic floor.
Keep the space between
your sitting bones and
root your tailbone
down, extending from
your pelvis down
through your feet.
Extend your left arm
over your left ear and
look up under the arm.**



5 Hold for several breaths, then pull your legs toward each other, inhale, and come up.

Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 5 except rest your elbow on your knee rather than taking the fingers to the floor.



Triangle

Utthita Trikonasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward
- ▶ Forward

- ▶ Down

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation
- ▶ Helps relieve menopausal discomfort
- ▶ Relieves symptoms of sciatica
- ▶ Stretches the arches, calves, hamstrings, and groin

- ▶ Opens the throat, chest, shoulders and hips
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Stabilizes and strengthens the legs and torso
- ▶ Increases muscular endurance

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus

- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind
- ▶ Relieves stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Neck injury (do not look up)
- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Congestive heart disorders



1 Stand in Tadasana
(see [page 28](#)).



2 Step your feet wide apart. Inhale and extend your arms out to the side. Ideally your ankles

should be under your wrists.



3 Turn your left foot in slightly; turn your right

leg and foot directly out to the side.



4 Keep your legs

**engaged. Inhale and
extend your spine.
Exhale and bend to the
right at the waist. Place
your right fingertips on
the floor.**



5 Turn your head to look up toward your left thumb.

6 Hold for several

breaths, then pull your legs toward each other and come out of the pose. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 5, but place a block under your hand directly under your shoulder in step 4.



Warrior II

Virabhadrasana II

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Over fingertips of

forward extended hand

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the arches, ankles, knees, and thighs
- ▶ Stretches the hips and shoulders
- ▶ Broadens the chest
- ▶ Increases lung capacity

- ▶ Stimulates digestion and circulation
- ▶ Enhances muscular endurance
- ▶ Lengthens the spine

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind

Contraindications

- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Neck injury



1 Stand in Tadasana
(see [page 28](#)).



2 Step your feet wide apart. Inhale and extend your arms out to the

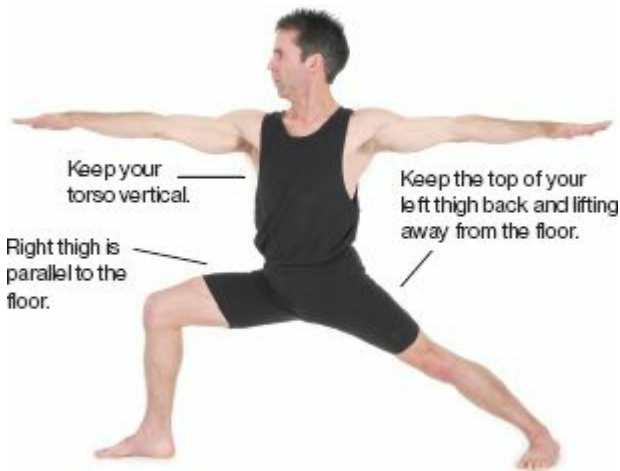
side.



3 Turn your left foot in slightly; turn your right leg out directly to the

side.

4 Keeping your legs engaged, exhale and bend your right knee to 90 degrees.



5 Hold for several breaths. To release, pull your legs toward each other to engage the muscles, inhale, and come out of the pose. Repeat on the other side.

Other Variation



Crescent Lunge

Alanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

- ▶ Upward, through fingertips

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the arches, ankles, knees, and thighs
- ▶ Stretches the hips and shoulders
- ▶ Opens the chest
- ▶ Stimulates digestion

- ▶ Increases muscular endurance
- ▶ Relieves symptoms of sciatica

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds mental focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind

Contraindications

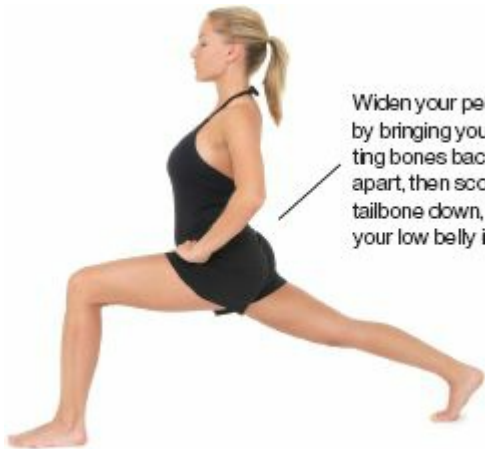
- ▶ Neck injury
- ▶ Knee injury (use the gentle variation)



1 Start in Downward-Facing Dog (see [page 30](#)).



2 Inhale, step your left foot forward into a lunge, and keep your back leg straight.



Widen your pelvic floor by bringing your sitting bones back and apart, then scoop your tailbone down, drawing your low belly in and up.

3 Inhale and lift your torso up and bring your hands onto your hips. Press down with your left foot and pull it back

**against the resistance of
the floor as you pull
from the right foot
forward to square your
hips.**



4 Inhale and stretch your arms over your head and clasp your hands with the index

**fingers pointing up to
the ceiling. Exhale and
root from your low belly
down through your feet.
Inhale and extend from
your low belly up
through your hands.
Lengthen your neck and
press your head back to
curl your shoulder
blades more onto your
back in a back bend.
Hold for a few breaths.**

Pull your legs toward each other as in step 3, inhale, and come up. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4 except keep your back knee on the floor and your hands unclasped shoulder-

width apart.



Other Variation



Warrior I

Virabhadrasana I

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the arches, ankles, knees, and thighs
- ▶ Stretches the hips and shoulders
- ▶ Broadens the chest
- ▶ Stimulates digestion and circulation

- ▶ Increases muscular endurance
- ▶ Relieves symptoms of sciatica

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind

Contraindications

- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Neck injury



1 Stand in Tadasana
(page 28).



2 Step your right foot forward one full, comfortable stride. Turn

**the heel of your left foot
in slightly so that the
foot faces out at a slight
angle.**

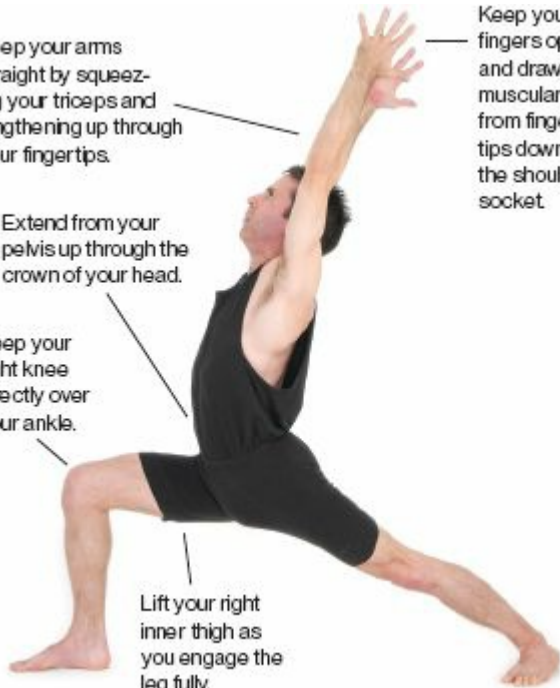
Keep your arms straight by squeezing your triceps and lengthening up through your fingertips.

Extend from your pelvis up through the crown of your head.

Keep your right knee directly over your ankle.

Lift your right inner thigh as you engage the leg fully.

Keep your fingers open and draw muscularly from fingertips down into the shoulder socket.



3 Keeping your legs

engaged, exhale and bend your right knee to 90 degrees. Place your hands on your hips and square them to the front. Adjust the distance between your feet as needed so that your right shin is perpendicular to the floor when your right thigh is parallel to the floor. Inhale and extend

your arms over your head. Root your tailbone down, extending from your pelvis down through your legs.

4 Hold for a few breaths. To release, root down through your feet into the floor, inhale, straighten your front leg, and come up to standing. Repeat on the

other side.

**Revolved Extended
Side-Angle
Parivrtta
*Parsvakonasana***

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward
- ▶ Forward
- ▶ At the floor

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the ankles, calves, knees, and thighs
- ▶ Relieves symptoms of sciatica
- ▶ Opens the hips and

groins

- ▶ Increases lung capacity
- ▶ Alleviates symptoms of arthritis
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Stimulates the circulatory and lymphatic systems

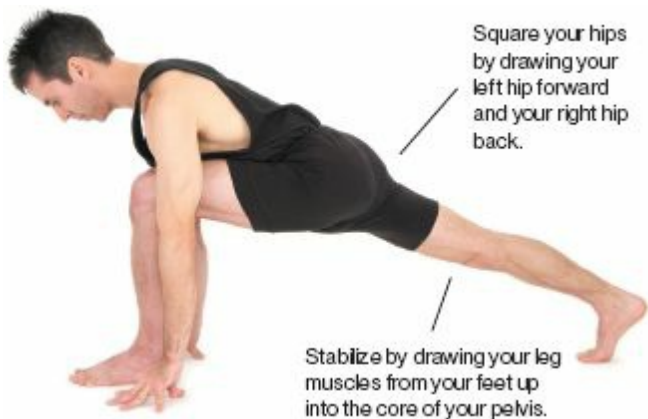
Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee injury
- ▶ Low blood pressure

► Migraine



1 Start in a Lunge with your left foot forward and your right leg

straight.



2 Keeping your legs engaged, lift your torso

**and place your hands
on your front thigh.**



3 Keep your legs

**hugging in to stabilize
your pelvis, and use
your hands against your
left thigh to twist your
torso to the left.**



4 Hook your right armpit as deeply as possible across your left knee and place your

right hand on the floor. Spin your right leg so that the foot is flat on the floor. Extend your left arm over your left ear, palm face down.

5 Hold for several breaths, then pull your legs toward each other and come out of the pose. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4, then press your palms together in a prayer position. Drop the back knee if necessary.



Revolved Triangle

Parivrtta Trikonasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward
- ▶ Forward

- ▶ At the floor

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation
- ▶ Tones and stretches the calf, thigh, hamstring, and abdominal muscles
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Opens the throat, chest, and shoulders

- ▶ Strengthens the hip muscles and opens the groin
- ▶ Improves balance

Mental Benefits

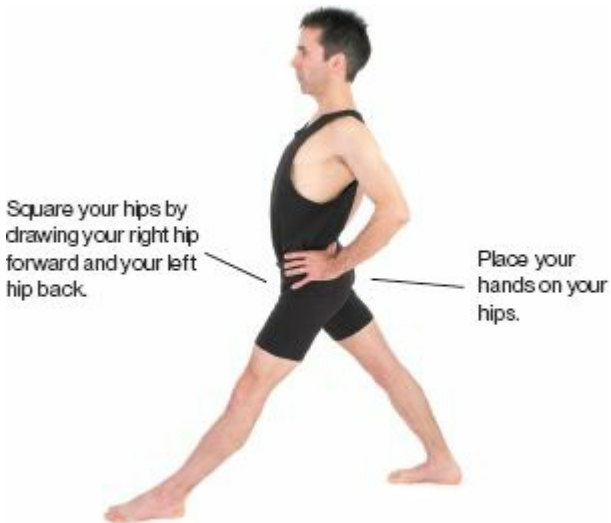
- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind
- ▶ Relieves stress and mild anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Migraine
- ▶ Insomnia
- ▶ Low blood pressure



1 Stand in Tadasana
(page 28).

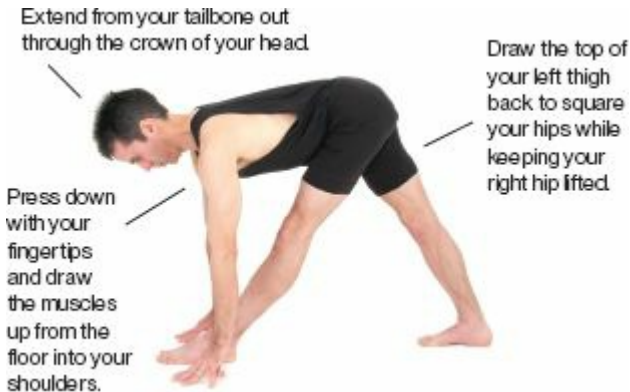


Square your hips by drawing your right hip forward and your left hip back.

Place your hands on your hips.

2 Step your left foot 3 to 3½ feet forward and turn your right foot out at a slight angle. If you are

unable to square your hips, step your right foot to the right a few inches until you can bring the hips in line.



3 Inhale and lengthen from your pelvis up through your head. Exhale, bend forward, and place your fingertips on the floor.

4 Bring your left hand to your hip. Inhale and extend from the core of the pelvis out through the crown of the head, lengthening the spine. Exhale and twist your

torso to the left, starting from your low belly. Then twist your ribs, shoulders, and head, in that order, and raise your left arm to the ceiling.



5 Hold for several breaths, then place your

**left hand on your hip
and turn your gaze to
the floor. Bring your
right hand up to your
other hip. Lengthen
your spine from the
core of your pelvis out
through the crown of
your head. Root down
through your feet into
the floor, inhale, and
come up. Repeat on the
other side.**

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 5, but place a block under your hand in step 4.



Chair

Utkatasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Strengthens the feet, ankles, calves, knees, buttocks and thighs
- ▶ Opens the chest
- ▶ Stimulates the digestive, circulatory and reproductive systems

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Insomnia
- ▶ Knee injury (use the gentle variation)



1 Stand in Tadasana (page 28).



2 Exhale, bend your knees to 90 degrees,

and touch your
fingertips to the floor.



3 Inhale and stretch your arms overhead. Draw from your fingertips down into the shoulder sockets

4 Hold for 15 to 30 seconds. To release, inhale, straighten your legs, and stand up. Exhale and lower your arms to your sides.

Gentle Variation

Follow the steps 1 through 3 except bend the knees only slightly and remain in the pose for a few breaths.



Standing Intense Spread-Leg Pose

Prasarita Padottanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ At the floor

- ▶ Eyes closed
- ▶ Tip of nose

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the feet, ankles, knees, inner thighs, and lower back
- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation
- ▶ Tones abdominal cavity

- ▶ Reduces minor backache
- ▶ Relieves headache and symptoms of sinusitis

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress and

anxiety

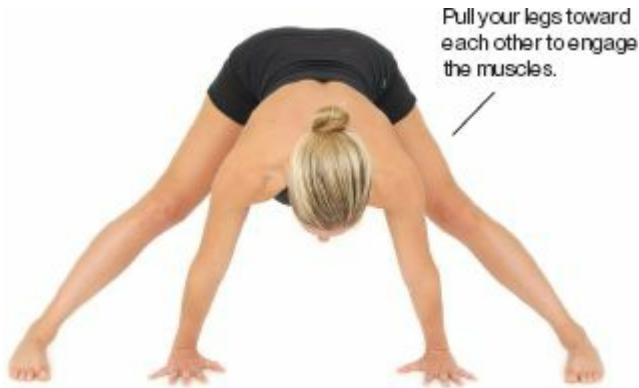
Contraindications

- ▶ Low back injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ High blood pressure



**1 Stand with your legs
4½ to 5 feet apart and**

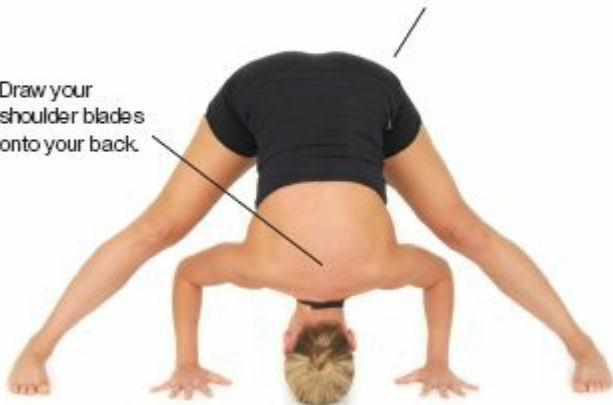
**your feet parallel. Place
your hands on your
hips. Inhale and extend
from your pelvis up
through your head.**



2 Exhale, bend forward, and place your hands on the floor with your fingertips in line with your toes.

Exhale, root your tailbone down and extend from your pelvis through your feet. Inhale and extend from your pelvis out through the crown of your head.

Draw your shoulder blades onto your back.



3 Exhale and bring the top of the head to the floor.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 and 2,
but place a block
directly under each
shoulder for your
hands.



Other Variation



Beam

Parighasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Child's Pose
(Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Lengthens the side of the body
- ▶ Opens the chest
- ▶ Tones the abdominal organs
- ▶ Strengthens the ankle, knee, and hip joints
- ▶ Stretches the arches, calf, thigh, and

abdominal muscles

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Increases clarity
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ High blood pressure—
keep both hands above
heart level
- ▶ Sciatica

- ▶ Hip, knee, or groin injury



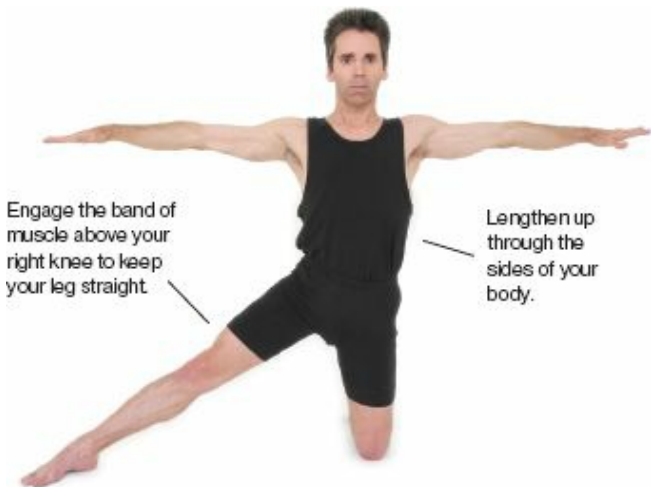
1 Kneel on the floor with

your hands on your hips and flex your feet.



2 Stretch your right leg out to the side and keep

**your foot in line with
your left knee. Turn
your right foot in at an
angle.**



3 Inhale and stretch your arms out to the sides, parallel with the floor.



**4 Inhale and draw
muscularly from your**

**right foot up into the
core of your pelvis.
Take the sides of your
waistline back, lengthen
your tailbone down,
round your back, and
bring your torso slightly
forward. Exhale, bend
your torso to the right,
and slide your right
hand down your leg,
palm facing up. Bring
your left arm over by**

the side of your ear.



5 Keep your back rounded, exhale, stretch your right arm over to the left, and touch your palms together. Stay for a few breaths. To

release, pull your legs toward each other, inhale, and return to standing. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4 only.

Humble Warrior

Counterposes

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)
- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ At the floor

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches the sides of the body
- ▶ Opens the chest
- ▶ Tones the abdominal organs
- ▶ Strengthens the ankle, knee, and hip joints

- ▶ Opens the hips
- ▶ Stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Helps alleviate symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome in wrists and forearms
- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Strengthens the thighs, calves, and feet

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Increases clarity
- ▶ Reduces stress, mild depression, and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Low blood pressure—keep your head above your heart
- ▶ Knee injury

► Pregnancy (after the first trimester)



1 Stand in Tadasana
(see [page 28](#)) with your
feet parallel and hip-
width apart.



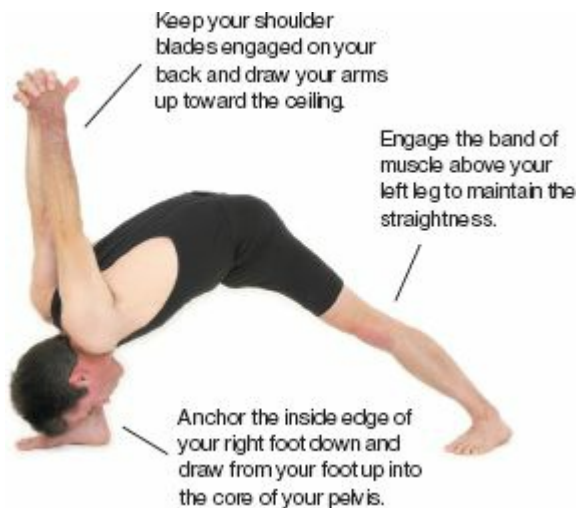
2 Bring your legs wide apart. Turn your left foot in, turn your right foot

**out, and turn your torso
to the right. Square your
hips and clasp your
hands together.**

Extend from the core of your
pelvis out through the crown of
your head.



3 Inhale, lengthen up through the sides of your body, pin the heads of your arm bones back, and draw your shoulder blades onto your back. Exhale, bend your right knee, and extend your torso over your right leg.



4 Exhale, bend your torso forward between your legs, and bring your head close to the

floor.

5 To release, pull your legs toward each other. Inhale and return to standing. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Perform a Lunge with your back knee down.



Intense Side-Stretch

Parsvottanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward
- ▶ Forward, on shins

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens the chest
- ▶ Strengthens the feet, ankles, shins, knees, and thighs
- ▶ Releases the hips
- ▶ Stretches the hamstrings
- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation

- ▶ Stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands
- ▶ Tones the abdominal muscles
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Improves balance

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Increases clarity
- ▶ Reduces stress

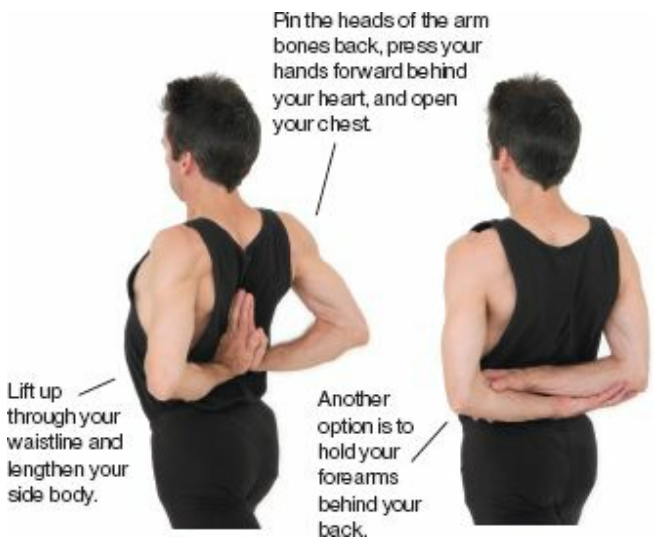
Contraindications

- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Pregnancy



1 Stand in Tadasana
(see **page 28**) with your

feet parallel and hip-width apart.



2 Inhale and bend your

**elbows and join your
palms together behind
your back with the
fingers pointing up.
Exhale and slide your
folded hands up your
back between your
shoulder blades.**

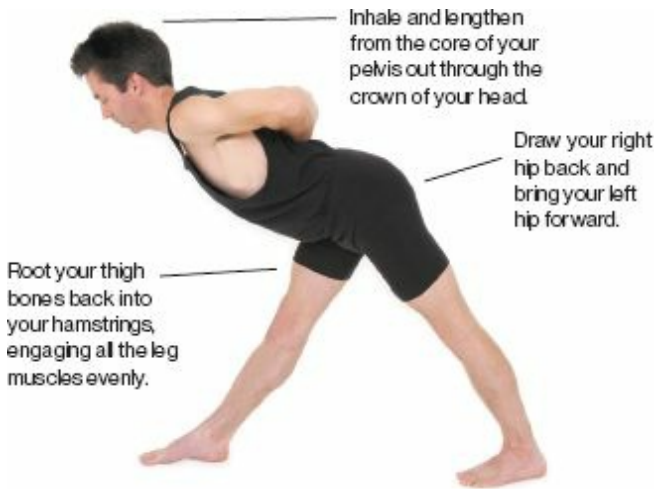
Anchor your tailbone down and lift your chest up from behind your heart.

Root down through the four corners of your feet, hug your leg muscles to the bone, and draw muscularly from your feet up into the core of your pelvis.



3 Exhale, step your right foot forward 3 to 3½ feet, and square your

hips.



4 Maintain the extension of your spine. Exhale and bend your torso

forward.



5 Continuing your exhalation, extend your torso forward over your leg and bring your chin

to the top of your shin. Stay in this pose for several breaths. To release, hug your legs together (pull them toward each other) and root down through your feet into the floor. Inhale and return to standing. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4, keeping your hands on your hips. Use blocks under your hands for the final step.



Other Variations





chapter 3

Balancing Postures

Balancing postures require a great deal of focus, strength, and stamina. They develop poise, agility, coordination, and concentration. They require you to draw into your core muscles and

thus, your inner awareness. They are strengthening poses in which muscle tone is created and precise alignment is essential. Regular practice of the balancing postures shown in this chapter helps you develop increased control over your body.



Eagle

Garudasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Mountain (Tadasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Strengthens the feet, ankles, calves, and thighs
- ▶ Opens the shoulders, chest, back, and hips
- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation
- ▶ Stimulates the pituitary and thyroid glands

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind

Contraindication

- ▶ Knee injury



1 Stand in Tadasana
(see **page 28**).



2 Balance on your left leg with your knee slightly bent. Lift your

**right leg and cross it
over your left leg at the
knee.**



Draw the top of
your foot into your
leg for stability.

Hug your
legs
together.

Keep the knee
of your stand-
ing leg bent

3 Hook your right foot behind your left shin, hugging your legs together.

Lift your
elbows and
extend from
your elbows
through your
fingers.

Squeeze the
muscles of the
standing leg on
all sides.



**4 Cross your left elbow
over your right and join**

the palms of your hands.



5 Hold for several breaths, come out of the pose and repeat on the other side.

Tree

Vrksasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Remedies flat feet
- ▶ Strengthens the arches, ankles, calves, and thighs
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Opens the shoulders, chest, thighs, and hips
- ▶ Improves circulation

Mental Benefits

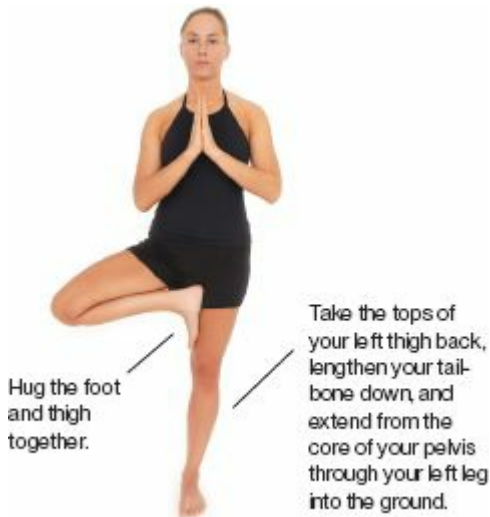
- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Cultivates poise and focus

Contraindications

- ▶ Headache
- ▶ High blood pressure (keep hands under the heart)



1 Stand in Tadasana
(see [page 28](#)).



2 Spread your toes and root down through all four corners of your feet. Inhale and draw

muscularly from your feet up into the core of the pelvis and hug your legs together. Focus on a point in front of you. Keeping your left leg strong and steady, inhale, bend your right leg and place the right foot against the inner left thigh. Bring your palms together in front of your heart.



Keep the arms
fully engaged
and straight.

**3 Inhale, lengthen the
sides of your body from**

the hips up to the shoulders and bring your shoulder blades onto your back. Extend your arms over your head beside your ears and bring your palms together.

4 Hold for several breaths then lower the arms and leg simultaneously. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow the instructions for steps 1 and 2, but bring your foot only as high as your ankle.



Other Variation



Tiptoe Pose

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ At fingertips
- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the arches, ankles, calves, and thighs
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Relieves symptoms of sciatica
- ▶ Opens the shoulders, chest, thighs, and hips

- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Cultivates poise

Contraindications

- ▶ Headache

- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ High blood pressure



1 Stand in Tadasana
(see [page 28](#)).



2 Balance on your left leg. Bend your right knee, hold your right foot, and draw your knee out to the side. Take your heel up toward your navel.



Press your toes
back into your left
thigh.

Keep the top of
your left thigh back.

**3 Roll your right foot
and leg forward and
down, and place your**

foot at the left thigh crease.

Keep your right foot drawn in close in the thigh crease.



Hug the leg muscles from your knees into your pelvis.

Keep your toes spread and active.

4 Bend forward at the waist and touch the

floor.



5 Keeping your hands in contact with the floor, bend your left knee and sit down on your left

heel. Place your left heel near the perineum, up off the floor.



6 Balance on your left heel by bringing your

hands up to prayer position. Hold for several breaths, then come out of the pose and repeat on the other side.

Boat

Navasana

Counterposes

- ▶ Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward, at big toes

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Builds core strength
- ▶ Improves balance, digestion, and circulation
- ▶ Strengthens the legs, hips, groin, abdomen, and arms
- ▶ Lengthens the spine and neck
- ▶ Opens the chest, shoulders, and throat

- ▶ Improves posture

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Improves concentration
- ▶ Develops focus

Contraindications

- ▶ Pregnancy (keep knees bent)
- ▶ Neck or low back

pain/injury (keep knees bent)

- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Menstruation



1 Sit in Dandasana (see page 170).



— Draw the
low back
in and up.

2 Bend your knees and place your hands on

your upper shins. Inhale and lengthen from the core of your pelvis up through the crown of your head. Draw in muscularly from your hands up to your shoulders and bring your shoulder blades onto your back behind your heart.



3 Maintain all the actions from step 2. Lean your torso back and balance on your buttocks between your

sitting bones and your tailbone.

Flex your feet, spread your toes, and press through the ball of the big toe.

Keep your arms parallel to the floor with the palms facing inward.

Maintain the curvature in your lower back.

4 Exhale and bring your

legs out straight at an upward angle while simultaneously stretching your arms forward. Extend from the core of your pelvis out through the inseam of your legs and up through the top of your head. Draw from your fingers up into your shoulders and bring the shoulder blades even

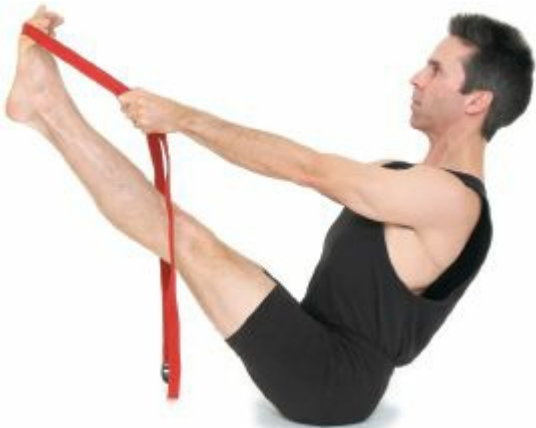
more onto your back.

5 Hold for 30 to 60 seconds, or as long as you can without losing the form of the pose, then release.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 5 but place a strap just below your toes. Press the balls of your feet

into the strap creating resistance by pulling the ends of the strap with your hands.



Revolved Half-Moon

Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ At the floor

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Tones the abdominal muscles
- ▶ Strengthens the feet, ankles, knees, and thighs
- ▶ Stretches the hamstrings

- ▶ Opens the chest and lungs
- ▶ Stimulates digestion and circulation
- ▶ Improves balance

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee injury
- ▶ Neck injury (keep gaze to the floor)
- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Headache



1 Start in a Lunge with your left foot forward and your right leg straight.



2 Inhale and lift up to balancing on your right

leg and the fingertips of both hands.



3 Bring your right hand to your hip. Inhale,

shrug your right shoulder to your right ear, and roll it back, twisting to open your chest to the right. Extend your right arm directly above your right shoulder. Exhale and extend from your pelvis out through your feet. Inhale; extend from your low belly up through your head and

out through your arms.



4 Hold for several breaths, then look down

and place both hands on the floor. Exhale and lower your right leg down. Place your hands on your hips, root through your feet into the floor, inhale, and come up to standing. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4. Place a block underneath your bottom hand for support.

Other Variations



Standing Extended-Leg Stretch

*Utthita Hasta
Padangusthasana*

Counterpose

- ▶ Mountain (Tadasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

- ▶ Up the leg, at the big toe
- ▶ Over the shoulder of the standing leg

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Strengthens the arches, ankles, calves, and thighs
- ▶ Stretches the hamstrings

- ▶ Lengthens the spine

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind
- ▶ Cultivates poise

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee, ankle, or hip injury (keep knee into

chest)

► Vertigo

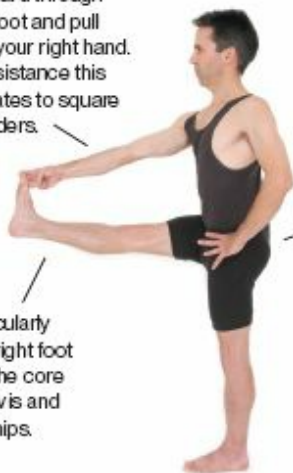
► Hernia



1 Stand in Tadasana (see [page 28](#)). Spread your toes and root down into the floor through all four corners of your feet. Inhale and draw muscularly from your feet up into the core of your pelvis. Bend your right leg, bring your arm to the inside of the leg, and grasp your big toe with the first two

fingers of your right hand.

Press forward through your right foot and pull back with your right hand. Use the resistance this action creates to square your shoulders.



Lengthen from your waistline up through your armpits and take your shoulders back, curling your shoulder blades more onto your back, behind your heart.

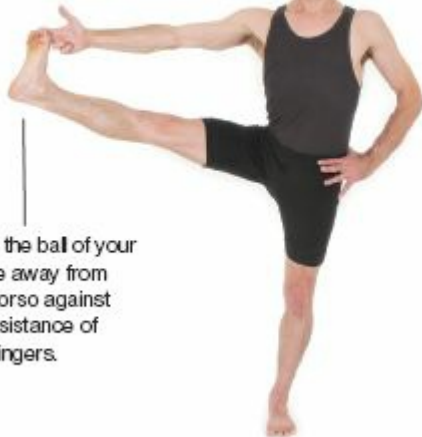
Draw muscularity from your right foot back into the core of your pelvis and level your hips.

2 Lower your right hip to bring your hip bones

**level. Maintain
steadiness in your legs
and torso. Exhale and
stretch your right leg
straight and parallel
with the floor.**

Root your tailbone down
and extend from your low
belly up through the crown
of your head.

Draw your
shoulder
blades more
onto your back.



Press the ball of your
big toe away from
your torso against
the resistance of
your fingers.

**3 Externally spiral
(rotate) your right leg
and descend your right
hip. Exhale and take**

your right leg out to the right.



4 Extend your left arm

out, parallel with the floor, with your palm facing down. Turn your gaze to the left. Hold for a few breaths. Release and repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 and 2. Wrap a strap around your left foot, just below

the toes.



Warrior III

Virabhadrasana III

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Straight ahead
- ▶ At the floor

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the feet, ankles, calves, knees, and thighs
- ▶ Improves circulation
- ▶ Enhances muscular endurance
- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Stretches the hips and groin

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind

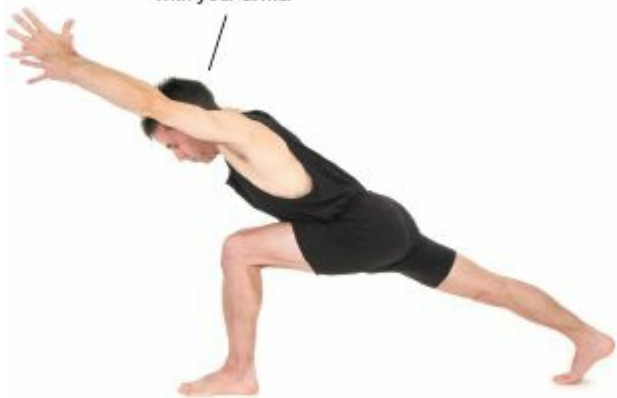
Contraindications

- ▶ Ankle injury
- ▶ Knee injury



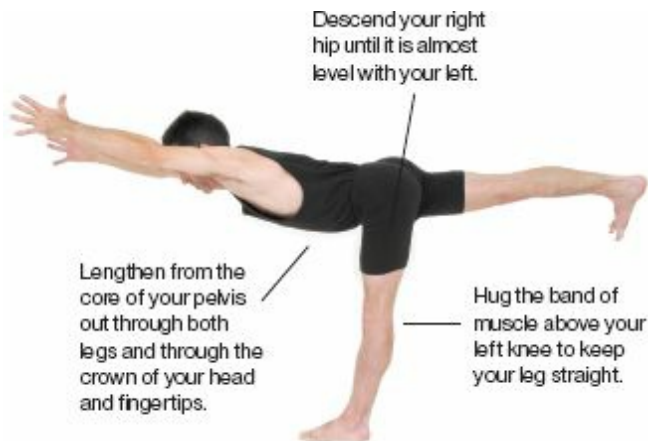
1 Stand in Tadasana
(page 28).

Keep your ears in line
with your arms.



2 Exhale, step your left foot forward, and bend your knee to 90 degrees. Bend your trunk forward and bring your belly to

your thigh. Extend your arms alongside your ears.



3 Inhale, lift your torso

up buoyantly like a hot air balloon, and balance on your left leg as you extend your right leg back. Rotate your right leg so that your knee and foot point directly toward the floor. Extend from your right groin out through your right inner ankle.

4 Hold for several breaths. Continue to

strongly engage the muscles of the legs to come out of the pose and lower slowly to an extended lunge with your fingertips on the floor by your left ankle. Repeat on the other side.

Dancer

Natarajasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Straight ahead, at fingertips

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Helps reduce menstrual discomfort
- ▶ Develops poise
- ▶ Strengthens the leg muscles and arches of feet
- ▶ Opens the chest and shoulders
- ▶ Increases lung

capacity

- ▶ Tones the spine

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee injury

- ▶ Vertigo
- ▶ High blood pressure



1 Stand in Tadasana (see [page 28](#)). Bend your right leg and hold the inside of your foot.



2 Inhale and extend

your left arm up.

Lengthen up through the right side of your body and take your right shoulder back.



Bend forward at your hip joint keeping length in the spine and hips level.

Continue to hug the midline and press your foot into your hand.

3 Exhale and take your right leg back.

Inhale and extend from the core of your pelvis up through the crown of your head.

Lengthen your tailbone down and extend from the core of your pelvis out through your right leg and down through your left leg.

Hug your leg muscles to the bone, especially engaging the muscles above your right knee.



4 Exhale, bend at your hips, bring your torso parallel to the floor, and

extend your right leg to the sky.

5 Hold for a few breaths, then exhale. Release and repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Use a strap to hold your foot.



Half-Moon

Ardha Chandrasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Over the fingertips
- ▶ Forward

- ▶ On floor

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves circulation
- ▶ Increases energy to the spine and low back
- ▶ Strengthens the arches, ankles, knees, and thighs
- ▶ Stretches the hamstrings

- ▶ Opens the chest and hips
- ▶ Relieves menstrual discomfort and sciatica
- ▶ Improves balance and coordination

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Builds focus
- ▶ Develops willpower
- ▶ Stimulates the mind

- ▶ Relieves stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee injury
- ▶ Neck injury (keep gaze forward or to the floor)
- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Vertigo



1 Stand in Tadasana
(see [page 28](#)).



2 Step your feet wide apart. Inhale and extend your arms out to the side.



3 Turn your left foot in slightly; turn your right leg out directly to the side.

Look down
toward your
right hand.

Keep your left
hand on your hip.

Keep your
leg muscles
engaged.



4 Exhale and bend your right knee and place your right fingertips about 10 to 12 inches in front of your right foot.



Engage the toes of your left foot and lift your inner left thigh farther from the floor. Stretch your left leg fully straight.

Place your right hand directly under your right shoulder.

Engage the muscles above your right knee and draw them from the knee up into your pelvis. Stretch your right leg fully straight.

5 Inhale and lift so you are balancing on your right leg and hand. Extend your left arm

fully above your left shoulder.



6

Keeping your

attention to your balance focused in your pelvis, turn your head to look up at your left hand.

7 Hold for a few breaths, then bring your left hand to your hip and turn your gaze down to the floor. Exhale, bend your right knee, and slowly bring your left leg down to the floor

behind you. Bring your hands to your hips, keep your legs engaged, and slowly come back to Tadasana. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 5. Place a block under your lower hand for support in step 4 and

keep your top hand on
your hip.



chapter 4

Arm-Balancing Postures

Arm balancing postures are great builders of core strength, confidence, and courage. Like standing poses, they increase vigor and mental alertness. Like balancing postures they require strength and

stamina. These
challenging postures
strengthen the entire
body, especially the
hands, wrists, arms,
shoulders and abdominal
core. Success in arm
balances does not require
early mastery of all the
postures. By merely
attempting these poses
with proper alignment you
will experience both

muscular and energetic changes in your body. You will find that you can progress toward the final postures while reaping the benefits along the way.



Inclined Plane

Purvottanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Seated Forward Bend
(Paschimottanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Energizes the body
- ▶ Opens the chest, shoulders, and throat
- ▶ Stretches the wrist, shoulder, and ankle joints
- ▶ Stretches the arm, leg, and back muscles
- ▶ Increases flexibility

and improves posture

- ▶ Relieves fatigue

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Improves concentration
- ▶ Develops focus

Contraindications

- ▶ Carpal tunnel syndrome

- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Wrist, elbow, or shoulder injury
- ▶ Tendonitis



Fingers pointing forward.

1 Sit with your legs straight out in front of you. Bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart. Place your hands on the floor behind your hips. Bend your elbows, inhale, and lengthen the side body from your hips up through your armpits. Exhale and draw your shoulder

**blades onto your back,
creating a gentle arch in
the back, and straighten
your arms.**



**2 Inhale, press your
hands and feet down,**

and lift your hips up off the floor. Lengthen your tailbone and extend from the core of your pelvis out through your knees.



3 Fully extend your right leg followed by your left leg. Press the soles of your feet down and draw muscularly from your feet up into your pelvis, keeping your hips lifted.



4 Exhale and lengthen from the core of your pelvis out through the crown of your head. Take the sides of your throat back, and curl your head back. Hold this pose for a few breaths. Exhale, bend your knees and arms, and lower your hips to the floor.

Gentle Variation

Follow the instructions for step 2; lift your hips only as high as you are able.



Lateral Inclined Plane

Vasisthasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Child's Pose
(Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Up toward raised hand
- ▶ Forward

- ▶ Down at bottom hand

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Builds core strength
- ▶ Strengthens the legs, arms, shoulders, and wrists
- ▶ Stretches the wrists
- ▶ Lengthens the spine

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Improves concentration
- ▶ Develops focus

Contraindications

- ▶ Wrist, elbow, or shoulder injury
- ▶ Carpal tunnel syndrome
- ▶ Tendonitis



1 Start in Downward-Facing Dog (see [page 30](#)).



2 Bring your right hand to the left along the midline of your body and creating a right

**angle with your torso.
Balance on the outer
edge of your right foot.
Bend your left knee and
place your left foot on
the floor in front of your
right leg.**



3 Stack your left foot on top of your right foot

**and extend your left arm
up.**



4 Turn to look up

toward the fingers of your left hand. Remain in the pose for a few breaths. Exhale and bring your arm down and transition through Downward-Facing Dog repeating the pose on other side.

Gentle Variation

Perform only steps 1

and 2 and hold the pose for a few breaths. Transition to Downward-Facing Dog and repeat the pose on the other side.

Other Variation



Crane

Bakasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Child's Pose
(Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Down and forward
toward fingertips

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves balance and coordination
- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Strengthens the abdominal muscles, building core strength
- ▶ Opens the hips and back
- ▶ Strengthens the arms

and wrists

- ▶ Stretches the wrists

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Improves concentration
- ▶ Develops focus

Contraindications

- ▶ Carpal tunnel syndrome

- ▶ Pregnancy
- ▶ Wrist or shoulder injury



1 Stand with your feet

**hip-width apart, bend
your knees and place
your hands flat on the
floor.**

With an inhale, puff
up your middle back
creating a fullness
and lift there.

Press your knuckles
down and create a
clawing action with
your fingers to engage
the muscles of your
hands and wrists.

Draw the muscles in and
up from the back of your
wrists to your shoulders.



**2 Bend your elbows,
bring your knees to the
back of your upper**

arms, come onto your toes, and begin to transfer more weight onto your hands.



3 Lift one leg at a time.

Keep lifting
upward into your
middle back with
the breath.

Squeeze the inner
edges of your feet
and inner thighs
together toward
the midline.

Straighten
your arms.



4 Press the inner edges of your feet together, along the big toe side, squeezing your legs to the midline—through

the core of the body in line with the spine and between the legs.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4 except place your feet on a block to help create more lift in your middle back and hips.



Other Variations





Peacock

Mayurasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Child's Pose
(Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Tip of nose

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the wrists, forearms, and elbows
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Tones the abdominal muscles
- ▶ Stimulates digestion
- ▶ Improves circulation to the intestines, colon, stomach, spleen, kidneys, and liver

- ▶ Cultivates balance and poise

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Improves concentration
- ▶ Develops focus

Contraindications

- ▶ Low or high blood pressure

- ▶ Insomnia
- ▶ Migraine
- ▶ Carpal tunnel syndrome



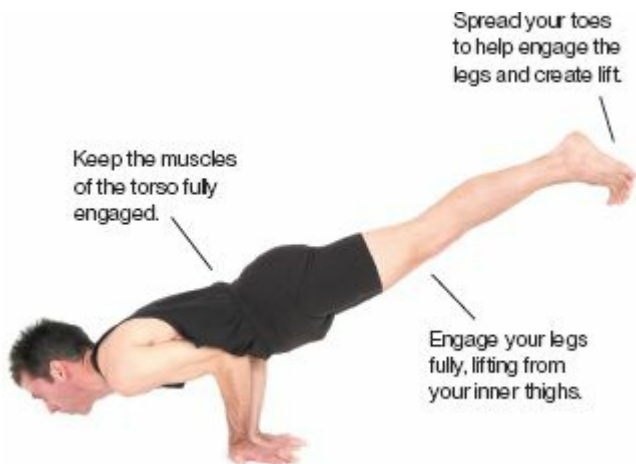
1 Start on your hands

**and knees with your
fingers facing back
toward your knees and
your little fingers
touching.**



2 Bend your elbows,

**keep your hands
together, and lean
forward to rest your
abdomen on your
elbows and your chest
on your upper arms.
Women may have to
separate their upper
arms more to leave
space and not
compress the breasts.**



3 Straighten your legs and bring your weight forward to balance on your arms and hands.

Gentle Variation

Keep your knees and feet touching the floor and practice brief lifts of your torso.

Other Variation



Four-Limbed Staff

Chaturanga Dandasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ On the floor

- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdominals, shoulders, arms, and wrists
- ▶ Improves circulation and digestion
- ▶ Helps relieve minor tendonitis and fatigue
- ▶ Energizes the body

- ▶ Builds core strength

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Improves concentration
- ▶ Develops focus

Contraindications

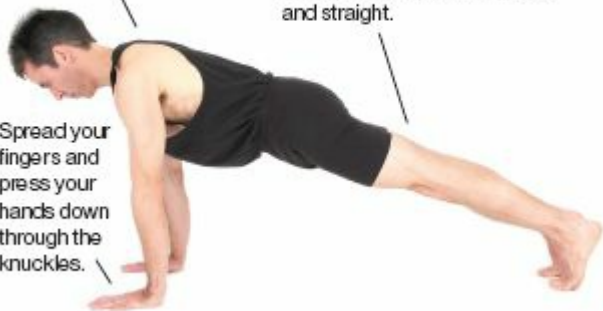
- ▶ Carpal tunnel syndrome
- ▶ Pregnancy (use the

gentle variation)

Keep your neck in line with your spine.

Lengthen your tailbone down toward your heels and keep your legs muscularly engaged and straight.

Spread your fingers and press your hands down through the knuckles.



1 Bring your body into a plank pose. Place your hands under your shoulders with your

arms straight. Extend your legs back and flex your feet. Lift the sides of your waistline up. Maintaining the lift, draw your shoulder blades onto your back.

Keep your shoulders at or above the level of your elbows. Do not allow the shoulders to dip.

Keep your waistline up so that it does not dip toward the floor.



2 Maintain all of the actions from step 1. Exhale and lower your body until your upper arms are parallel with the floor.

3 Hold for a few breaths. Release by lowering your body to the floor.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 and 2,

but keep your knees on
the floor.



chapter 5

Inverted Postures

Inverted poses reverse the effects of gravity, revitalizing the entire system. They replenish the brain and stimulate the organs and glandular system by reversing the normal flow of blood and

lymph. After an inversion the normal circulatory patterns are restored with a new vitality. Inversions also strengthen the upper body and nervous system and improve digestion and elimination. They require focus and concentration and create clarity of perception, equipoise, and calm. They are usually not practiced during

pregnancy and are not to
be practiced during
menstruation.



Shoulder Stand

Sarvangasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Rest on your back

Drishti

- ▶ At the toes

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches and strengthens the neck, shoulders, and rhomboids
- ▶ Alleviates insomnia
- ▶ Relieves sinus pressure
- ▶ Improves circulation
- ▶ Helps relieve menopausal discomfort
- ▶ Stimulates thyroid, parathyroid, and

prostate function

- ▶ Reduces varicose veins

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Relieves mild depression and stress
- ▶ Calms the mind

Contraindications

- ▶ Neck or disk injury

(use the gentle variation)

- ▶ Menstruation
- ▶ First trimester of pregnancy
- ▶ High blood pressure



1 Lie on your back, placing the tops of your shoulders on the edge of two or three folded blankets. Bend your knees and place your

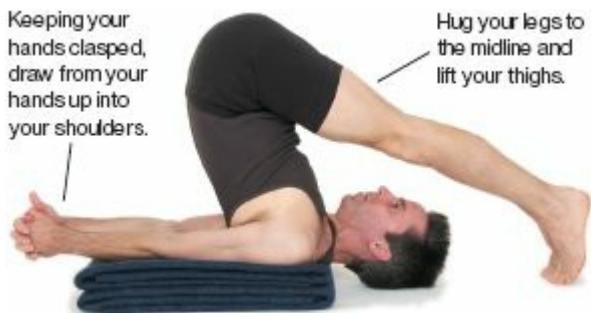
feet flat on the floor.



Keep your chin away
from your chest,
maintaining the
curve of the neck.

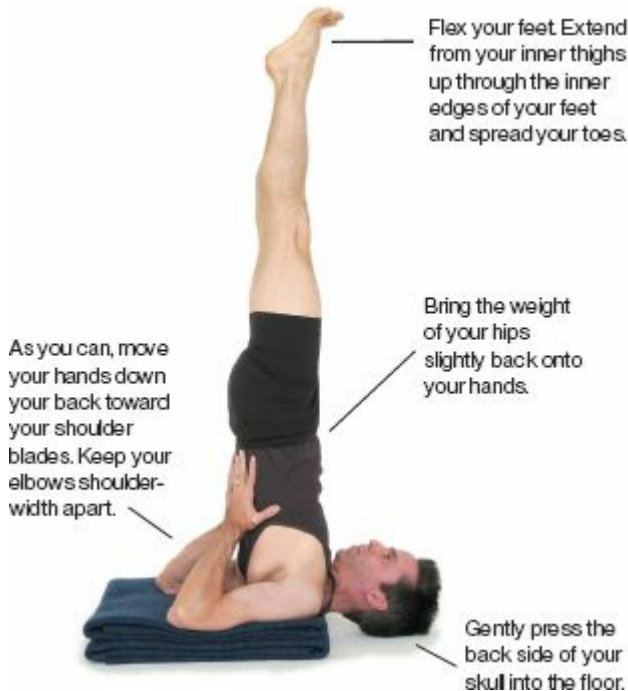
2 Lift your hips off the blanket and clasp your hands underneath your body. Walk your shoulders one at a time more toward your spine

**and closer to your ears.
This creates lift under
your neck and shoulder
blades.**



**3 Lower your hips to the
blanket. Bring your legs**

over your head and touch your feet to the floor in Halasana (Plow) pose (see [page 92](#)).



4 Bring your hands onto

your back and lift your legs upward. Rotate your upper thighs inward and take your thighs back. Keeping your thighs back, lengthen your tailbone toward your feet.

Gentle Variation

Perform Legs-Up-the-Wall (see page 94); lie

with your legs up the wall and your hips on a bolster or blanket.

Other Variations



Plow

Halasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Rest on your back

Drishti

- ▶ At the top of thighs

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Assists in relieving backache
- ▶ Stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands
- ▶ Stretches the shoulders
- ▶ Strengthens the spine
- ▶ Alleviates insomnia
- ▶ Helps relieve menopausal discomfort

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Reduces mild stress and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Menstruation
- ▶ Neck injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Asthma
- ▶ Pregnancy

► High blood pressure



1 Lying flat on the floor,

**extend your legs
vertically by bending
your knees toward your
chest and then
extending your feet
toward the ceiling.**



2 Inhale deeply, press your hands into the floor, and swing your legs forward over your

head.

Spread your toes, hug your legs to the midline (through the core of the body in line with the spine), and lift your thighs toward the ceiling.



Press the back of your head into the floor and take your chin away from your chest to increase the curve in your neck.

Draw in muscularly from your hands to your shoulders, bringing your shoulder blades strongly onto your back.

3 Bring your toes to the floor and keep your hips

above your shoulders. Stay in the pose for several breaths. Using your hands for support, slowly roll onto your back and come out of the pose.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3 except place two folded blankets under

your shoulders. Keep your head and neck on the floor and maintain the natural curve in the neck.



Other Variations



Legs-Up-the-Wall

Viparita Karani

Counterpose

- ▶ Corpse (Savasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Relieves fatigue in the legs and feet
- ▶ Prevents edema and varicose veins
- ▶ Soothes the nervous system
- ▶ Relieves mild backache, headache, and insomnia
- ▶ Relieves symptoms of arthritis
- ▶ Alleviates urinary and

respiratory disorders

- ▶ Increases circulation

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression, stress, and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Glaucoma

- Serious neck or back injury



1 Sit on a bolster or

**folded blankets with
your left hip against the
wall. Bend your knees.**



2 Reach your hands

**behind your body and
lean your torso
backward.**



3 Lean back and rest on

**your hands as you
swivel your hips and
bring your feet up the
wall.**



4 Keep your buttocks close to the wall and lie

**down on your back.
Rest with your arms out
to the sides, palms up.
Close your eyes and
relax in the pose,
breathing softly and
evenly.**

Head Stand

Sirsasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Child's Pose (Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Tip of nose

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stimulates the prostate and pituitary glands
- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Strengthens the spinal muscles
- ▶ Strengthens the arms, legs, and abdomen
- ▶ Improves circulation
- ▶ Reduces varicose veins

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild stress and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Heart conditions
- ▶ Neck or back injury
- ▶ Menstruation
- ▶ High blood pressure

- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Pregnancy (during the first trimester)
- ▶ Glaucoma



1 Start on your knees

**with your forearms on
the floor. Tightly
interlace your fingers,
placing special
emphasis on the index
and middle fingers.
Form a cup shape with
your hands. Firmly
press the pinky sides of
your hands on the floor
and anchor your
forearms down. Keep
your wrists**

perpendicular to the floor.

The back of your head touches your hands at the heel of the hands.



2 Walk your knees a few inches behind your hips and lengthen the sides of your body from your

**waistline up through
your shoulders. Exhale,
melt your heart toward
the floor and engage
your shoulder blades on
your back. Place the
crown of your head on
the floor.**

Keep your
elbows the
same width
as your
shoulders.



3 Straighten your legs and walk your feet in toward your head. Position your hips directly over your shoulders while keeping your shoulder blades

engaged on your back.

4 Bend your knees and use the strength of your abdominal core to gently lift or hop your feet off the floor.

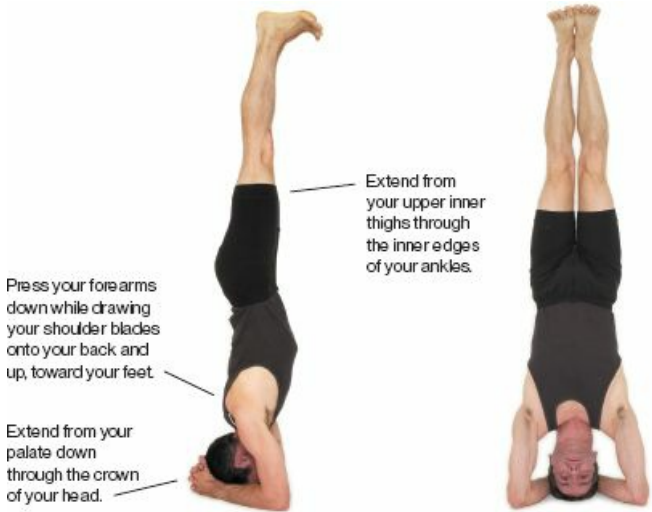


Keep your
shoulder blades
engaged on
your back.



5 Hug your legs together; lift your knees directly over your shoulders and lengthen

your tailbone up toward the ceiling. Distribute the weight between your head and your forearms. Actively extend your head into the floor to avoid compressing your neck.



6 Extend your legs straight up over your torso. Hug your thighs to the midline and

**straighten your legs.
Flex your feet, spread
your toes, and draw the
little-toe sides of your
feet toward the floor.**

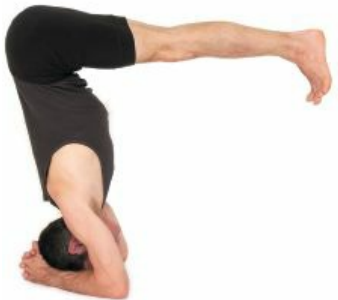
Gentle Variation

As a strengthener to prepare for the Head Stand, perform steps 1 and 2 except keep your head off the floor, your

hips behind your
shoulders at an angle,
and engage your
shoulder blades
strongly on your back.



Other Variations



chapter 6

Backward-Bending Postures

Backbends are rejuvenating, strengthening, and awakening. They are most effective at opening the upper back, chest, shoulders, and front groin,

and increasing spinal flexibility. Backbends release held emotional energy better than any other class of asanas. They keep the spine supple while developing strength in the back, legs, and shoulders. Backbends should not be practiced close to the time for sleep as they are heating and invigorating. They should

be followed by a series of cooling poses such as twists or forward bends to allow the spine to realign.



Cobra

Bhujangasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Child's Pose (Balasana)
- ▶ Lying on belly

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves posture
- ▶ Stimulates the circulatory, digestive, and lymphatic systems
- ▶ Opens the chest, shoulders, and throat
- ▶ Lengthens the spine and increases spinal flexibility

- ▶ Strengthens the low back, shoulders, and legs
- ▶ Reduces fatigue

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Pregnancy
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Severe spinal or neck injury

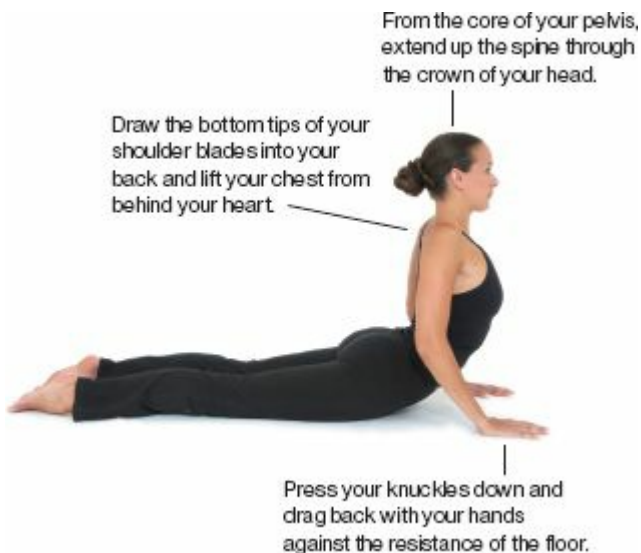


1 Lie on your belly.



2 Bring your forehead to the floor. Bend your elbows, place your palms near the lower ribs, and keep your lower arms perpendicular to the floor. Exhale, press down with your hands,

lengthen through the side body, and lift the head of your arm bones up away from the floor. Draw your shoulder blades onto your back.



3 Press all ten toenails down and draw muscularly from your feet up into the core of

your pelvis. Anchor your tailbone down. On your next inhalation, press your hands down and lengthen from the waistline up into the armpits. Lift your torso up and pin the heads of your arm bones back.

4 Keeping your neck long, slide the sides of your throat back and curl your neck to look

up.



5 Hold for a few breaths. Exhale, release, and rest on your belly.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3. Keep your forearms on the floor.



Upward-Facing Dog

Urdhva Mukha
Svanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)
- ▶ Child's Pose
(Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the legs, buttocks, torso, shoulders, arms, and wrists
- ▶ Opens the chest, increasing lung capacity

- ▶ Stretches the shoulders and back
- ▶ Lengthens the spine and opens the abdominal cavity
- ▶ Stimulates the digestive and lymphatic systems
- ▶ Improves posture

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind

- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Creates focus

Contraindications

- ▶ Back or neck injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Pregnancy (after the first trimester)
- ▶ Carpal tunnel syndrome



1 Lie on your belly.



2 Bend your arms and slide your palms back until your lower arms

are perpendicular to the floor. Inhale and lengthen the sides of your body shrugging your shoulders up towards your ears. Lift your shoulders up away from the floor and bring your shoulder blades more onto your back behind your heart.



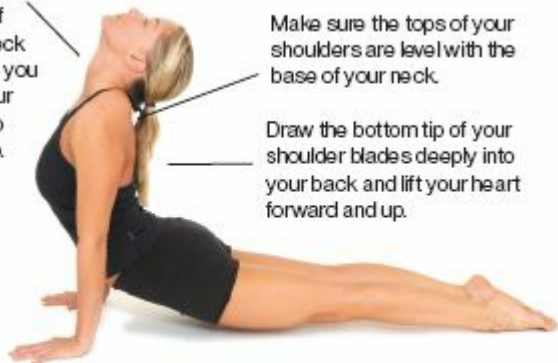
3 Exhale, press your hands down, lengthen up through the sides of your body, and draw the head of your arm bones

**backward. Draw your
shoulder blades
securely onto your back
and straighten your
arms. Engage the
muscles above your
knees and lift your legs
off the floor.**

Keep the back of your neck long as you curl your head to look up.

Make sure the tops of your shoulders are level with the base of your neck.

Draw the bottom tip of your shoulder blades deeply into your back and lift your heart forward and up.



Actively press your knuckles and fingertips down and engage the muscles of your arms.

4 Press your knuckles into the floor and pull your hands back toward your feet against the

**resistance of the floor.
Slide your body and
legs forward slightly
between your hands.
Lengthen the sides of
your body from your
waistline up to your
armpits and take the
head of your arm bones
back even more.
Keeping your neck long,
slide the sides of your
throat back and curl**

**your neck to look up.
Remain in the pose for a
few breaths, then slowly
release back down to
the floor.**

Gentle Variation

Follow the preceding
instructions, keeping
your thighs on the floor.



Camel

Ustrasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)
- ▶ Child's Pose (Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward
- ▶ Closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches the thighs, torso, chest, shoulders, and throat
- ▶ Strengthens the legs, pelvis, and lower back region
- ▶ Opens the hips and hip flexors

- ▶ Aids digestion
- ▶ Stimulates circulation
- ▶ Increases spinal flexibility
- ▶ Improves posture

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Relieves stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Spinal or neck injury
- ▶ Low blood pressure



1 Kneel on the floor with your thighs parallel and rest your palms on your hips. Point your feet

**straight back and press
your toenails into the
floor. Inhale and take
your thighs backward.
On the next exhalation,
scoop your tailbone to
lengthen your lower
back.**

Lift your heart up to the sky and curl your shoulders back.

Rooting the tailbone down, bring your pelvis forward.



Press your shins into the floor.

2 Inhale and extend from your pelvis through your head. Exhale and reach back

**to place your right hand
on your right heel.
Repeat with your left
hand.**



3 Keep your neck

**elongated and slide the
sides of your throat
straight back.
Maintaining the length
in your neck curl your
head backwards.**



4 Slide your hands down to the soles of your feet. Remain in this position for a few breaths. Exhale, powerfully root down through your shins into the floor, and lift from behind your heart and keep your head back as you come up. Rest by sitting back on your heels for a few breaths.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4, but place a block on the outside of each ankle and rest your hands on the blocks instead of on your feet.



Bridge

Setu Banda

Sarvangasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward

- ▶ Closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves flexibility in the spine and shoulders
- ▶ Stimulates the nervous system
- ▶ Aids digestion
- ▶ Opens the chest, neck, and shoulders

- ▶ Stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands
- ▶ Increases lung capacity
- ▶ Relieves menstrual and menopausal discomfort
- ▶ Relieves high blood pressure, asthma, and sinusitis
- ▶ Reduces fatigue

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Neck or shoulder injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Wrist injury (omit step

4)



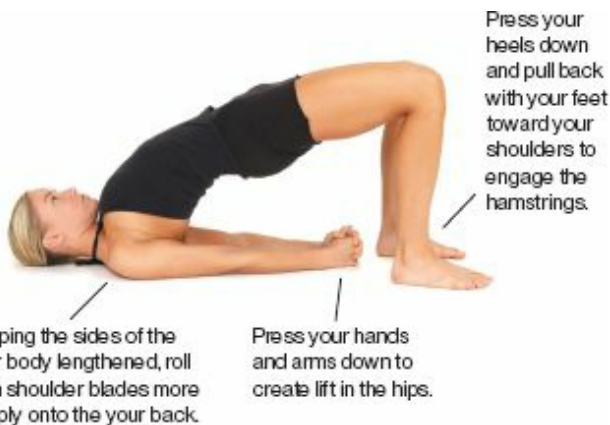
1 Lie on your back.



Lengthen the sides of the body, press your shoulders down to the floor, and bring your shoulder blades more onto your back.

Press your sitting bones down into the floor to create a natural curve in the low back.

2 Bend your knees and place your feet parallel to each other and hip-width apart.



3 Inhale, press your feet

**into the floor, and lift
your hips. Lengthen
your tailbone and
extend from your pelvis
out through your knees.
Clasp your hands
together under your
back and roll your right
and left shoulders
underneath one at a
time, drawing your
shoulder blades more
onto your back.**



Press the back of your head gently into the floor while lifting your chin away from your chest to create and strengthen the natural curve in the neck.

Spread your toes and press on the inner edges of your feet to draw your thighs parallel.

4 Press your feet into the floor, inhale, and lift your hips higher. Unclasp your hands, shift your body weight

slightly to the right and bring your left hand up to cradle your back ribs with your palm. Repeat this action on the other side. Remain in the pose for a few breaths, then release your hands and slowly lower your hips to the floor.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4. Keep your arms by your sides, palms down. Use a blanket to support your shoulders if needed.



Bow

Dhanurasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Lying on belly
- ▶ Child's Pose
(Balasana)
- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ On floor, directly under nose

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches the ankles, calves, thighs, and spine
- ▶ Strengthens the spine

- ▶ Opens the chest and throat
- ▶ Aids digestion
- ▶ Energizes the body

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee or back injury
- ▶ Neck injury (keep your gaze on the floor)
- ▶ Pregnancy



1 Lie on your belly.

Spread your toes and
press through the ball
of the big toe.



Keep your thighs parallel.

2 Rest your chin on the floor. Inhale, bend your knees, and hold of the tops of your feet.

Extend from your pelvis out
through the crown of your
head, lengthening your spine.

Draw your shins
in and keep your
thighs parallel.



Only your belly stays on the floor.

3 Inhale, press your knees into the floor, and lift your hips up. Exhale and scoop your tailbone, extending

outward toward your knees. Inhale again, and lengthen the sides of your body from your hips to your armpits. Exhale and draw your shoulder blades onto your back behind your heart, press your feet powerfully into your hands, and lift your legs and torso off the floor. Hold the pose for a few

breaths. Exhale, lower your knees, release your hands, and rest on your belly.

Gentle Variation

Proceed only through step 1. Inhale and lift your chest, head, arms, and legs off the floor.



Other Variation



Locust

Salabhasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Lying on belly
 - ▶ Child's Pose (Balasana)
- Pose

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

- ▶ Tip of nose

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Opens the chest, shoulders, and throat
- ▶ Strengthens the legs, buttocks, shoulders, and arms
- ▶ Tones the abdominal cavity and aids digestion

- ▶ Stimulates circulation
- ▶ Increases flexibility
- ▶ Improves posture

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Reduces stress
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Energizes the mind

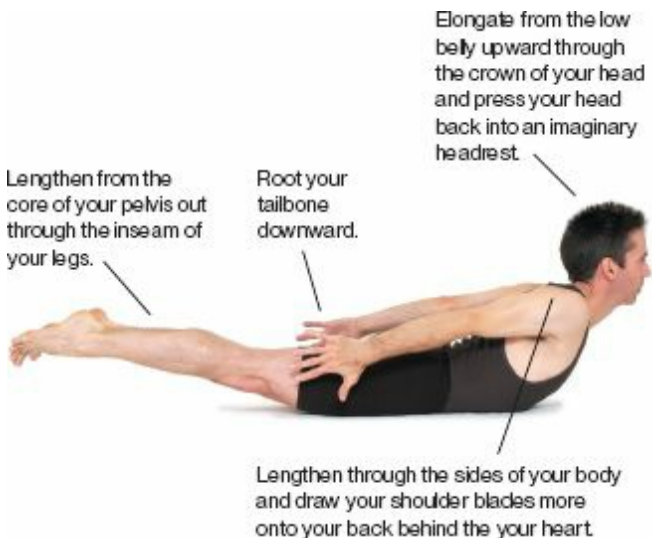
Contraindications

- ▶ Headache
- ▶ High blood pressure
- ▶ Spinal or neck injury
(use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Pregnancy



**1 Lie on your belly.
Stretch your arms**

straight back by your side. Rest your forehead on the floor.



2 Inhale and simultaneously lift your head, chest, arms, and legs off the floor. Enthusiastically spread your fingers and toes to maintain greater muscle tone. Maintain steady breathing.

3 Remain in the pose for a few breaths and release.

Gentle Variation

Alternately lift one arm and the opposite leg at the same time.



Other Variations



Upward-Facing Bow

Urdva Dhanurasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana)
- ▶ Knees-to-Chest (Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Keeps the spine strong and supple
- ▶ Stretches the wrists, forearms, shoulders, and spine
- ▶ Opens the chest
- ▶ Increases lung capacity

- ▶ Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, chest, shoulders, and wrists
- ▶ Stimulates the lymphatic, digestive, and reproductive systems
- ▶ Helps relieve infertility, osteoporosis, backache, and asthma
- ▶ Promotes proper pituitary and thyroid

function

- ▶ Increases stamina

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ High or low blood

pressure

- ▶ Carpal tunnel syndrome
- ▶ Back, neck, or knee injury



1 Lie on your back.



Press your hands downward and draw muscularly up from the hands to the elbows.

From the elbows, draw the muscles down into your shoulders, hollowing the armpits. Your shoulders will press down into the floor.

2 Bend your knees and place your feet hip-width apart and parallel. Bend your arms and place your palms near your shoulders with the

fingers pointing toward the feet.

Press your fingertips into the floor and draw back from your elbows into your shoulders, hollowing the ampits.

Spread your toes and root down evenly through all four corners of your feet. Keep your shins and feet parallel.



Draw your shoulder blades onto your back, keep your elbows drawing back while you bring your chest forward toward your elbows.

3 Inhale, press your palms into the floor, lift

your torso, come to the top of your head, and pause. Widen your hands to at least shoulder-width apart and bring your index fingers parallel. If your shoulders are tight, widen a bit more and slightly spin your fingers outward.

Keep hollowing
your armpits
back and bring
your chest
forward.

Press down through
the inner edges
of your feet and
descend your inner
groins a couple of
inches. Then scoop
your tailbone and
lengthen it toward
your knees.

Make sure your
hip bones are
level with your
bottom ribs.

Claw with your fingers and
draw up muscularly from your
wrists into your shoulders.
Straighten your arms.

4 **Maintain** **your**
shoulder **integration.**

Inhale, press your hands and feet into the floor and lift your body up into an arch. Remain in the pose for several breaths. Bend your elbows, bring your chin to your chest and lower onto your shoulders to come out of the pose.

Gentle Variation

Perform the Bridge
(Setu
Sarvangasana). See
also page 106.



Other Variations



Fish

Matsyasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Seated Forward Bend
(Paschimottanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Upward
- ▶ Closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens the hips, abdominal cavity, chest, and throat
- ▶ Stretches the hip flexors
- ▶ Aids digestion
- ▶ Helps relieve asthma
- ▶ Improves posture
- ▶ Strengthens the

muscles of the upper
back, neck, and
shoulders

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Neck injury
- ▶ Migraine
- ▶ High or low blood pressure
- ▶ Insomnia
- ▶ Low back injury
- ▶ Knee or hip injury (use the gentle variation)



1 Sit with your legs folded in the Lotus pose (see [page 156](#)).



2 Lean your torso back and rest on your elbows.

Lengthen from your
pelvis out through
your knees.

Lift your chest upward.



3 Lower your shoulders and the back of your head to the floor. Bring your arms out straight by your sides.

Actively pull your feet and bring your shoulder blades more onto your back behind your heart.



Lengthen your tailbone, stretch the front of your thighs, and extend from your pelvis out through your knees.

Press the back of your head into the floor and back toward your hips, deepening the arch of the back and coming more onto the crown of your head.

4 Inhale, press your elbows down, lift your chest, curl your neck

back, and rest the top of your head on the floor. Hold the soles of your feet with your hands. Remain in the pose for several breaths. Come out of the pose by using your elbows for support to lower your back to the floor. Then use your elbows to bring yourself back up to a sitting position and release

your legs.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 2 through 4. Keep your legs extended and place your hands against your thighs for support.



Other Variations



Cat–Cow

Counterpose

- ▶ Child's Pose (Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ At navel
- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Increases spinal flexibility
- ▶ Opens the lower back and abdominal cavity
- ▶ Aids digestion
- ▶ Opens the chest, throat, and shoulders
- ▶ Increases circulation
- ▶ Stimulates thyroid and

parathyroid function

- ▶ Therapeutic for mild carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, sciatica, and low back injury

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Severe carpal tunnel syndrome



1 Come to all fours with

**your wrists directly
underneath your
shoulders and your
knees under your hips.
Inhale and lengthen
from your hips up to
your armpits. Spread
your fingers and root
down through your
hands as you draw from
the floor up into your
shoulders. Bring the
shoulder blades onto**

your back.



2 Exhale, press your hands into the floor, and round your spine

**up toward the ceiling.
Tilt your pelvis down
and scoop your
tailbone.**

**3 Inhale and move your
spine in the opposite
direction, creating
concavity in the spine.
Tilt your pelvis upward
and lift your head.**



4 Repeat steps 2 and 3 for five to ten breaths. Push back into Child's Pose and rest for a few breaths.

Pigeon
Eka Pada
Rajakapotasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)
- ▶ Seated Forward Bend
(Paschimottanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Upward
- ▶ Closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the body
- ▶ Opens the hip flexors, thighs, chest, and shoulders
- ▶ Improves circulation to

the abdominal cavity
and low back

- ▶ Stimulates the digestive and reproductive systems
- ▶ Alleviates menstrual and menopausal discomfort
- ▶ Encourages healthy thyroid, parathyroid, and adrenal function
- ▶ Therapeutic for low

blood pressure,
infertility, and
headache

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Energizes the mind
- ▶ Relieves mild depression and anxiety
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee or hip injury
- ▶ Back or shoulder injury



1 Bend your left knee and place your left foot

**near your right groin
with your toes pointed.
Extend your right leg
straight back, with the
front of the thigh, the
shin, and the top of the
foot resting on the floor.
Widen your right hip out
to the right and square
your hips to the front.**

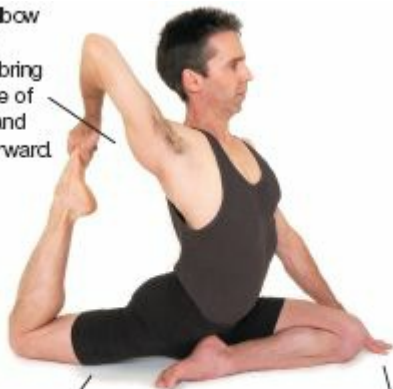
Turn your foot out to the side and grasp across the instep with a strong grip.



2 Stretch your right arm back with the palm facing up. Inhale and lengthen the sides of your body. Exhale and turn your head, torso,

chest, and shoulder to the right. Bend your back leg and grasp your right foot with your right hand.

With your elbow straight up, exhale and bring the right side of your torso and shoulder forward



Draw from your knees up into the core of your pelvis and create a strong, balanced base.

Press the fingertips of your left hand down and evenly distribute the weight between the left hip and the front of your right thigh.

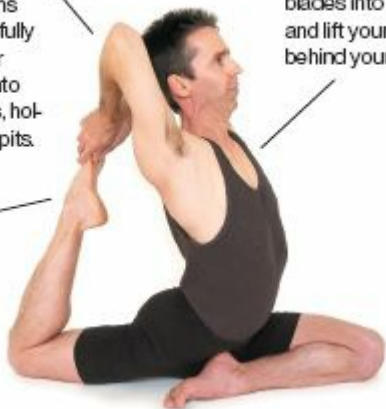
3 Keep your torso and shoulder turned to the right and draw your right elbow in closer to

your side. Inhale and swing your right elbow up. Maintain a strong grip on the foot, swivel the hand, and bring the palm facing down.

Bring your elbows closer together and your upper arms parallel. Powerfully draw from your elbows back into your shoulders, hollowing the armpits.

Draw your shoulder blades into your back and lift your chest from behind your heart.

Press your right foot back into the resistance of your hands to deepen the shoulder stretch.



4 Inhale, press your left fingertips into the floor, and lift from your waistline up to your shoulders. Exhale,

**reach your left arm up
and back, and grasp
your foot.**



**5 Curl your head back to
touch your right foot.**

Remain in the pose for a few breaths, then exhale, release your hands one at a time, and lower your leg. Repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4 except use a strap on your foot.



chapter 7

Twisting Postures

Twists are a unique class of postures because they are cooling and soothing after backbends, yet stimulating after forward bends. They are sometimes referred to as “smart poses” because

they give the body what it needs to return to homeostasis. Twists massage and tone the entire visceral system and detoxify the glands and organs. In addition, they replenish the circulation to the spinal muscles and disks creating hydration and mobility. They squeeze the abdominal organs as the trunk

rotates, allowing fresh blood to surge into organs following a twist. If you are pregnant, be sure to use the gentle versions of the twists.



Gentle Spinal Twist

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Over shoulder
- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation

- ▶ Reduces discomfort from backache, neck pain, and sciatica
- ▶ Stretches and strengthens the spine, shoulders, and hips
- ▶ Relieves menstrual discomfort
- ▶ Stimulates the lymphatic system

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Relieves stress, mild depression, and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Digestive discomfort
- ▶ High or low blood pressure
- ▶ Headache



1 Start in Dandasana
(see page 170).



2 Bend your left leg and place your foot in close to the perineum.

Root down through
both sitting bones
and extend from
the core of your
pelvis up through
your spine.



**3 Bend your right leg,
and fold your foot in
front of your left ankle,
heels in line with each
other.**



4 Place your left hand on your right knee.

Originate the twist in the core of your pelvis, spiraling the twisting action upward through the spine. The last part of the twist is your head turning to the right.



Press your left hand into your right knee for added leverage while twisting.

5 Place your right hand behind your back on the floor. Maintain a firm foundation by rooting your sitting bones into

the floor. Draw from your knees in toward the core of your pelvis to stabilize the pelvis and sacrum. Inhale and lengthen your spine. Exhale and twist to the right. Hold the pose as long as your breath is steady then return to step 3 and repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 5, but sit on a folded blanket to elevate your hips. Maintain a straight back by supporting your upper body on your fingertips if necessary.



Reclining Spinal Twist

Jathara Parivartanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches the spine and shoulders
- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation
- ▶ Strengthens the lower back
- ▶ Relieves lower backache, neck pain, and sciatica

- ▶ Opens the hips and chest

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Helps relieve stress, mild depression, and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ High or low blood pressure

- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ Menstruation
- ▶ High blood pressure



1 Lie on your back with your legs extended.



Keep your knees
and feet close
together.

2 Draw your knees up into your chest and wrap your arms around your legs.



3 Keep your knees at your chest and sweep your arms out to the sides.

4 Inhale, take your

**knees to the left, then
turn your head to the
right.**



5 Hold for a few breaths. Inhale, bring your knees and head back to center, and repeat on the other side.

Other Variations



Simple Sitting Twist

Bharadvajasana I

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Over shoulder
- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens the chest and neck
- ▶ Stimulates the digestive and lymphatic systems
- ▶ Increases circulation in the spine and abdominal cavity
- ▶ Improves digestion

- ▶ Relieves carpal tunnel syndrome
- ▶ Alleviates sciatica
- ▶ Strengthens the hips, shoulders, and spine
- ▶ Relieves low back and neck discomfort

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Reduces stress
- ▶ Relieves mild anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Headache
- ▶ High or low blood pressure
- ▶ Ankle or knee injury (use the gentle variation)



1 Sit on your left hip, bend your knees, and bring both feet to the right of your hips. Point

**your right foot and
place it on the arch of
your left foot.**



2 Place your right hand

on your left knee. Place your left hand behind you and come up onto your fingertips. Inhale and lengthen from the core of your low belly through the top of your head. Keep the length, exhale, and twist to the left.

3 Reach your left arm behind your back and clasp the inside of the

right upper arm. Insert your right hand under your left knee, palm facing downward. Inhale and extend from your pelvis up through the crown of your head. Exhale and twist deeply to your left. Turn your head and gaze over your right shoulder.

Lengthen up through the sides of the body. Draw your shoulder blades more onto your back to open the front of your chest.



4 Hold for a few breaths. Release and repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Perform Gentle Spinal
Twist (see page 122).



Bound Half-Lotus Twist

Bharadvajasana II

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Over the shoulder

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the spine, legs, and arms
- ▶ Opens the shoulders and chest
- ▶ Tones the abdominal muscles
- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation
- ▶ Relieves backache and sciatica

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Reduces stress
- ▶ Relieves anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Hip, knee, or ankle injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Headache
- ▶ High or low blood pressure (use the

gentle variation)

► Insomnia



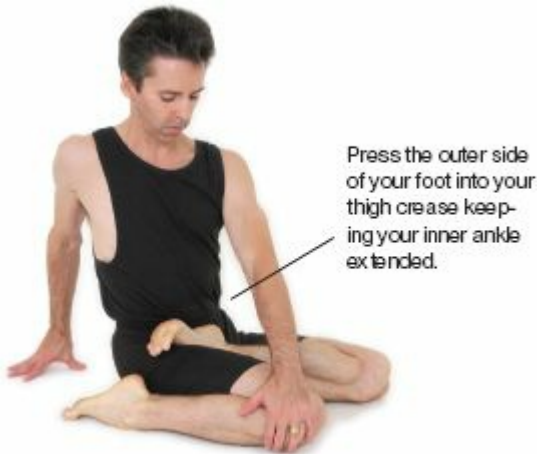
1 Sit on the floor with

your legs extended (Dandasana). Fold your right leg back so that your ankle rests outside your hip. Bring your hands back with the fingers facing forward and press your fingers into the floor. Lengthen up through the sides of your body and draw your low back in and up.



2 Bend your left leg and cradle your ankle and foot in your hands. Keep your left foot

flexed and spread your toes.



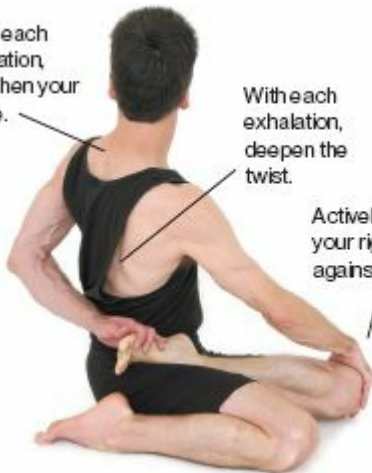
3 Bring your left leg into half-lotus by drawing

your heel in toward your navel. Rest the top of your foot near your right thigh. Bring your right hand behind your back and place your left hand on your right knee.

With each
inhalation,
lengthen your
spine.

With each
exhalation,
deepen the
twist.

Actively press
your right hand
against your knee.



4 Reach around your back and hold your left foot. Place your right hand on your left knee. Inhale, extend from your

**low belly up through the
crown of your head,
exhale and twist from
your low belly up
through your torso.**



**5 Hold for a few breaths.
Release and repeat on
the other side.**

Gentle Variation

Perform Simple Sitting
Twist (Bharadvajasana
I) on page 126.



Seated Spinal Twist I

Marichyasana I

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Downward
- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Tones the abdominal muscles
- ▶ Stimulates the digestive, circulatory, and lymphatic systems
- ▶ Strengthens and stretches the legs and shoulders
- ▶ Massages the kidneys and liver

- ▶ Opens the chest and shoulders
- ▶ Promotes healthy pituitary gland function

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Relieves mild depression
- ▶ Reduces stress and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ High or low blood pressure
- ▶ Pregnancy (after the first trimester)
- ▶ Insomnia
- ▶ Migraine
- ▶ Knee or hip injuries (use the gentle variation)



1 Sit in Dandasana (see **page 170**). Press your hands down into the floor to lengthen your spine.



2 Bend your left knee and place your foot on the floor near your right thigh. Distribute your weight evenly between your sitting bones.

Place your arms behind you and press your fingertips into the floor. Inhale and extend from the core of your pelvis up through the crown of your head.

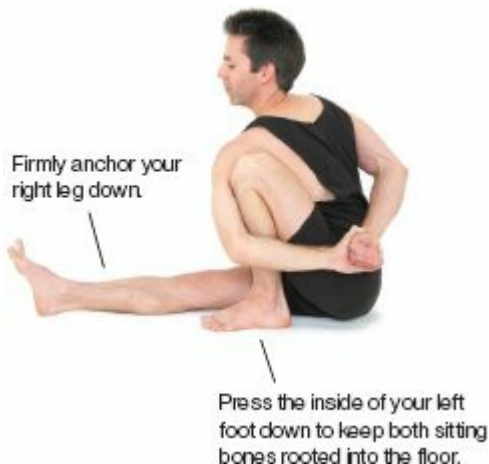
Stretch your arm fully until your armpit touches your left shin.

Press the inner edge of your left foot down and hug your thigh into your torso.

Extend through the inseam of your right leg and anchor your thigh bone down into the floor.



3 Stretch your left arm forward on the inside of your left leg.



4 Internally rotate your

left arm and bend the elbow. Wrap your left arm around the outside of your left leg. Bring your right hand around your back and clasp your right wrist with your left hand. Inhale, lengthen up through the sides of your body, and draw your shoulder blades more onto your back. Exhale and twist

your torso to the right.



5 Inhale and extend from your pelvis through the top of your head. Exhale and bow forward over your right leg. Hold this pose for a few breaths. Release

and repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4 except sit on a folded blanket. Hold a strap between your hands instead of clasping your wrist with your hand.



Other Variation



Seated Spinal Twist II

Marichyasana II

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Downward
- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Tones the abdominal muscles
- ▶ Stimulates the digestive, circulatory, and lymphatic systems
- ▶ Promotes healthy function of the pituitary gland
- ▶ Strengthens and stretches the legs and

shoulders

- ▶ Massages the kidneys and liver
- ▶ Opens the chest and shoulders

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Relieves mild depression
- ▶ Reduces stress and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ High or low blood pressure
- ▶ Pregnancy (after the first trimester)
- ▶ Insomnia
- ▶ Migraine
- ▶ Knee or hip injuries (use the gentle variation)

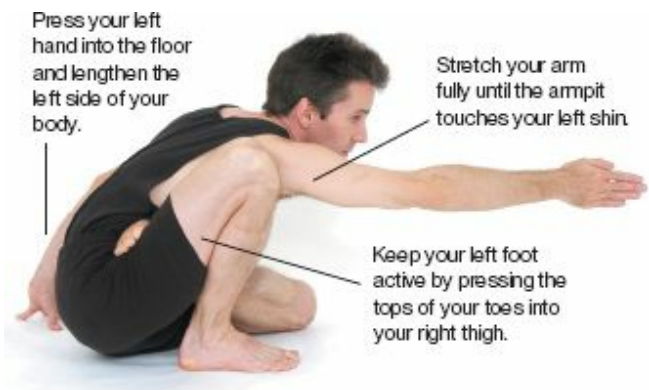


1 Sit with your legs extended (Dandasana, see [page 170](#)). Fold your left leg into Half-Lotus

by bringing your foot to the top of your right thigh crease. Press your hands into the floor to lengthen your spine.



2 Bend your right leg and place your foot near your hips.



3 Inhale and lengthen your spine. Bend at the torso and extend your right arm forward.

4 Exhale and internally rotate your right arm.

Bend the elbow and wrap your arm around the outside of your right shin and thigh. Bring your left arm around your back and clasp your right wrist with your left hand. Inhale, lengthen up through the side of the body, and draw your shoulder blades onto your back. Exhale, bend forward,

**and bring your head
toward your knee.**



**5 Hold this pose for a
few breaths. Release,
return to step 1, and
repeat on the other side.**

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through step 5 except sit on a folded blanket, keep one leg extended, and hold a strap between your hands instead of clasping your wrist with your hand.



Other Variation



chapter 8

Forward-Bending Postures

Forward bends are calming, soothing to the nervous system, and bring a deeper internal awareness. They open the entire backside of the body, stretching the

hamstrings, buttocks, and lower back. They release tension and improve digestions and elimination by massaging the abdominal organs and cleansing the liver and intestines. Seated forward bends increase circulation to the lower extremities and bathe the brain with fresh blood and oxygen.



Seated Forward Bend

Paschimottanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Closed
- ▶ At shins

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches the spine, hamstrings, and calves
- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Stimulates the lymphatic and reproductive systems
- ▶ Helps relieve menstrual and menopausal discomfort

- ▶ Improves liver, kidney, and colon function
- ▶ Alleviates high blood pressure, infertility, and sinusitis
- ▶ Reduces fatigue and insomnia

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Soothes the nervous system
- ▶ Relieves stress,

anxiety, and mild
depression

Contraindications

- ▶ Low back injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Asthma
- ▶ Pregnancy (use gentle variation keeping legs wide apart)



1 Sit with your legs extended. Inhale and press your hands down into the floor to lengthen your spine. Draw your low back

inward and upward.



2 Inhale and bring your arms up over your head.

Pull back muscularly from your hands into your shoulders, drawing your shoulder blades deeply onto your back.



Tilt your pelvis forward, draw your low back in and up creating a concavity in your low back.

Firmly anchor the inner edges of your thighs down and extend from the core of your pelvis out through your feet.

3 Exhale, bend forward, and grasp your big toes with your index and middle fingers using a firm grip. Press your big

**toe forward while
resisting back with your
fingers.**

Keep extending your
spine and tilting your
sacrum forward.

Press the big-toe sides of
your feet forward while
drawing the little-toe sides
back toward your knees.



Press your hands into the resistance of your feet, draw back
muscularly from your hands into your shoulders and actively
widen your elbows to draw your torso deeply forward.

**4 Inhale and extend
from your low belly up**

through the top of your head. Slide your hands to the outsides of your feet. Exhale, widen your elbows out, and draw your torso forward toward your feet. Keep your legs actively engaged and straight. Lead with your heart rather than your head.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3. For tight hamstrings and low back sit on a folded blanket and use a strap around your feet.



Other Variations



Standing Forward Bend

Uttanasana

Drishti

- ▶ At shins
- ▶ Closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the feet, knees, and thighs

- ▶ Stretches the hamstrings and calves
- ▶ Improves the function of digestive and reproductive systems
- ▶ Opens the hips and groins
- ▶ Stimulates the liver, kidneys, and digestive system
- ▶ Relieves menopausal discomfort, headache,

insomnia, and fatigue

- ▶ Alleviates discomfort from sinusitis

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Soothes the nervous system
- ▶ Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression

Contraindications

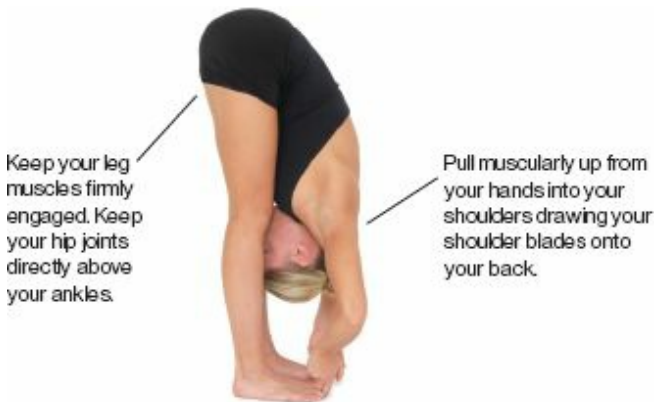
- ▶ Back injury (keep the knees bent)
- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Pregnancy (widen stance and keep knees bent)

1 Stand in Tadasana with your feet parallel (see [page 28](#)).



2 Inhale, stretch your arms up, and extend from your low belly up through your fingertips. Maintaining the length,

**exhale, bend forward,
and touch the floor.**



**3 Keeping the space
between the belly and
thighs, hold your big**

toes. Use the strength of your inner thighs to widen your sitting bones. Inhale, draw the sides of your waistline up, and root your tailbone down. Exhale and fold your torso deeply forward. Remain for several breaths.



4 Bring your hands to the backs of your calves.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3. Use a block under your hands to help you keep your legs straight and your lower back concave.



Other Variations



Head-to-Knee Forward Bend

Janu Sirsasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

- ▶ At shins

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens the chest and lungs
- ▶ Stretches the calf, hamstring, and lower back muscles
- ▶ Helps relieve menstrual and menopausal discomfort
- ▶ Improves digestion

- ▶ Increases circulation to the liver, kidneys, and colon
- ▶ Alleviates fatigue and headache
- ▶ Strengthens the low back

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Soothes the nervous system
- ▶ Relieves stress,

anxiety, and mild
depression

Contraindications

- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Knee injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Asthma



1 Sit with your legs extended. Press your hands into the floor and lengthen your spine upward.



2 Bend your right leg and move your knee out to the right. Place your right heel on the inner edge of your right thigh

**near the perineum.
Rotate your left leg
inward so that your
knee and foot point
straight up.**

Draw muscularly up your arms into your shoulders and bring your shoulder blades deeply onto your back.

Tilt your sacrum forward, draw your low back in and up.



Spread the toes of your left foot and powerfully press your big toe forward into the resistance of your hands.

3 Turn your torso to face your straight leg and extend your arms forward, holding your

foot with both hands. Inhale and lengthen from your pelvis up through your head.

4 Exhale and extend forward over your left leg, leading with your heart. Reach your hands forward around your left foot. Widen your elbows out, and draw your torso forward. If you are able to keep your spine

extended, you can place your forehead on your upper shin. Keep your left leg actively engaged and straight. Press your hands into the resistance of your foot, and actively widen your elbows to draw your torso deeply forward.

Expand into your left waist with your breath and lengthen from your left hip up through your left underarm.

To go deeper, you can hold one wrist.



Press the outer edge of your right foot down into the floor.

Press your left thigh down and extend from the core of your pelvis through the top of your head.

5 Stay in the pose for several good breaths. Release and repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3. For tight hamstrings and lower back sit on a folded blanket and use a strap around your foot.



Revolved Head-to-Knee Forward Bend

Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Seated Forward Bend
(Paschimottanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Closed

- ▶ Upward
- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Stretches the calf, hamstring, and low back muscles
- ▶ Opens the hips, groins, and shoulders
- ▶ Opens the

musculature and fascia
around the waist, rib
cage, and chest

- ▶ Stimulates the
reproductive system
- ▶ Circulates blood to the
liver, colon, and
kidneys

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Soothes the nervous
system

- ▶ Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression

Contraindications

- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Low back injury
- ▶ Neck or shoulder injury
- ▶ Pregnancy (after the first trimester)



Draw your right
knee back as
far as possible.

Place your right
heel close to your
right inner thigh
near the perineum.

1 Sit with your legs extended. Bend your right leg and bring your

**foot to your left thigh
with the knee out to the
right. Inhale and
lengthen through the
spine. Exhale and turn
your torso to face the
straight leg.**



2 Extend your left arm out and hold the inside of your left foot. Place your right hand on your right knee.



Press your left hand on your right knee to facilitate a deeper twist.

Press your left thigh bone down and extend from the core of your pelvis out through your feet.

3 Inhale and extend from your low belly up through the top of your head. Keep the length, exhale, and twist your belly and chest to the right, taking your left

**shoulder to the inside of
your left thigh. Reach
up with your right arm
to hold the outside of
your left foot.**

Twist your torso upward
resting the back of your
head on your left leg.

Widen your
elbows apart



Turn your left hand
so that the thumb is
facing downward.

4 Bring your left arm around to clasp the inside of your left foot, drawing your left shoulder even further inside your left thigh. With each inhale extend from your low belly through your head. With each exhale twist more deeply. Hold for several breaths then release and repeat on the other

side.

Gentle Variation

Perform steps 1 and 2.
Place your left hand on
your left shin and
stretch your right hand
up toward the ceiling.



Open-Angle

Upavistha Konasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ On the floor, directly

under nose

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens the low back
- ▶ Lengthens the spine
- ▶ Opens the hips, groin, and shoulders
- ▶ Stretches the hamstrings, calves, and inner thighs

- ▶ Stimulates digestive and reproductive systems
- ▶ Increases circulation to liver and kidneys

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Soothes the nervous system
- ▶ Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression

Contraindications

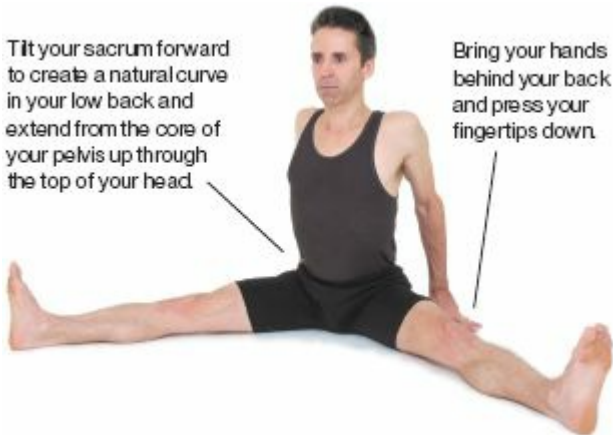
- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Low back injury
- ▶ Groin or hamstring injury



1 Sit with your legs extended. Press your fingertips into the ground and lengthen your spine upward.

Tilt your sacrum forward to create a natural curve in your low back and extend from the core of your pelvis up through the top of your head.

Bring your hands behind your back and press your fingertips down.



2 Widen your legs and rotate them inward so that your feet and knees point straight up. Manually rotate the flesh

**of your thighs inward
(inseam moves
downward) with your
hands and widen your
pelvic floor by moving
your buttocks flesh out
to the side and back.
Spread your toes.**



3 Maintain the curve in your low back. Inhale, elongate your spine, and bring your hands forward onto your

**fingertips. Firmly
ground the inseams of
your thighs into the
floor; extend from your
low belly out through
your legs and spread
your toes.**

Lift your elbows and the fronts of your shoulders and draw your shoulder blades more deeply onto your back.



Lengthen and open the front of your body.

Continue to pull back from your fingers into your shoulders to help engage your shoulder blades on your back.

4 Inhale and lengthen from the core of your pelvis up through the crown of your head. Exhale, bend your elbows out to the sides,

and bring your torso forward, leading with your heart. If you are able to keep your spine extended, you can rest your forehead on the ground. Stay in the pose for several breaths, then release.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through

4. For tight hamstrings or low back use a folded blanket under your hips.



Other Variations



Side Open-Angle

Parsva Upavistha

Konasana

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ At knee or shin

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves digestion

- ▶ Stretches the calf, hamstring, and low back muscles
- ▶ Strengthens the low back
- ▶ Promotes spinal flexibility
- ▶ Opens musculature and fascia around the waist and rib cage
- ▶ Opens the hips, groin, and shoulders

- ▶ Stimulates the reproductive system
- ▶ Increases circulation to the liver and kidneys

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Soothes the nervous system
- ▶ Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression

Contraindications

- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Low back injury (use the gentle variation)



1 Sit with your legs extended. Widen your legs apart to approximately 90 degrees and inwardly rotate them so that your feet and knees point straight up. Manually widen your pelvic floor by moving your buttocks flesh out to the side and back. Spread your toes. Bring your

**hands behind you and
firmly press the
fingertips down. Tilt
your pelvis forward to
create a natural curve in
the low back.**



2 Place your fingertips on either side of your right leg and turn your torso to the right. Exhale and root your

thighs and sitting bones down. Inhale, lengthen from your low belly through your head, and shift your belly, lungs, and heart to the right. Pull back toward your body with your hands.



3 Exhale, extend forward over your right leg, and hold your right foot with both hands.

Lift your elbows and the fronts of your shoulders to help you draw your shoulder blades more deeply onto your back.



Actively spread your toes and press your foot into your hands. Use the resistance of your foot and pull back with your hands to engage the muscles all the way up the arms and into the shoulders.

Press your thigh bones down and powerfully extend out through your legs.

4 Inhale and extend from your low belly up through your head. Exhale and extend

**forward over your leg,
leading with your heart.
If you are able to keep
your spine extended,
you can bring your
forehead toward your
upper shin. Stay in the
pose for several
breaths. Release and
repeat on the other side.**

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3. For tight hamstrings and low back sit on a folded blanket and use a strap around your foot.



Three-Limb Intense Stretch

*Triang Mukaikapada
Paschimottanasana*

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ On shin or kneecap

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches the spine, hamstrings, and calves
- ▶ Helps relieve menstrual and menopausal discomfort
- ▶ Enhances liver, kidney, and colon function

- ▶ Assists with symptoms of high blood pressure, infertility, and sinusitis
- ▶ Reduces fatigue
- ▶ Stimulates thyroid and parathyroid activity

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Soothes the nervous system
- ▶ Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild

depression

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee or low back injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Asthma
- ▶ Pregnancy



1 Sit with your legs extended. Press your hands into the floor and lengthen your spine

upward.



2 Bend your right leg

and place your ankle by the side of your right hip. Point your right foot straight back. Manually widen your hip flesh to the sides and distribute your weight evenly between your right and left buttocks.

Draw your
lower back
in and up.



Spread the toes of
your left foot and pow-
erfully press the big toe
forward while resisting
back with your hands.
Use this resistance to
help draw your shoul-
der blades deeply onto
your back.

3 Extend your arms forward and hold the sides of your left foot with both hands. Inhale and extend from your

low belly up through your head.

Keep your right sitting bone grounded to counter the tendency for your right hip to lift.

Anchor the inseam of your left leg down and extend from your low belly out through your foot.



Shift your low belly more over your left leg.

4 Exhale, widen your elbows out to the sides,

and extend your torso forward, leading with your heart. Keep your left leg actively engaged and straight. If you are able to keep your spine extended, you can touch your head to your shin.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4. To help keep your

hips level use a folded blanket under the straight-leg hip and use a strap around your foot.



Garland

Malasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Increases circulation to digestive system
- ▶ Opens the hips
- ▶ Relieves sciatica
- ▶ Improves balance
- ▶ Strengthens the arches of the feet and ankles
- ▶ Helps relieve menstrual discomfort
- ▶ Alleviates low back

pain

- ▶ Helps relieve constipation

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression
- ▶ Creates poise
- ▶ Cultivates focus

Contraindications

- ▶ Ankle or knee injury
- ▶ Vertigo
- ▶ High blood pressure
(broaden your stance)



1 Stand in Tadasana

with the inner edges of your feet touching (see [page 28](#)).



2 Bring your arms parallel with the floor to

help with balance. With your feet together and flat on the ground, exhale and squat down keeping your hips off the floor.

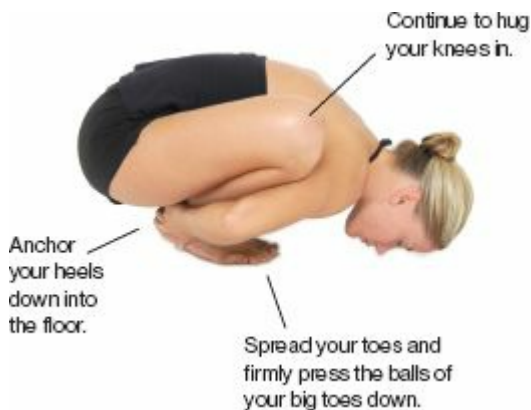
Root your tailbone down and extend from the core of your pelvis up through the crown of your head.

Press your hands together and widen your elbows out against the resistance of your knees drawing in.



Press the inner edges of your feet down and hug your knees into your upper arms.

3 Widen your knees apart and lean forward between them. Stretch your arms forward until your upper arms touch the insides of your knees and bring your hands into a prayer position.



4 Inhale, reach back with your hands, and hold your heels. Exhale and bring your head to the ground. Hold this pose for a few breaths,

then release.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3, but place a folded blanket under your heels.



Splits

Hanumanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Strengthens and tones thighs and hamstrings
- ▶ Opens the hips and groin and psoas muscles
- ▶ Improves circulation
- ▶ Prevents varicose veins

- ▶ Stimulates digestive, lymphatic, and reproductive systems
- ▶ Stimulates abdominal organs
- ▶ Prevents and relieves symptoms of sciatica and hernia
- ▶ Improves balance

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Calms the mind

- ▶ Reduces stress, mild depression, and anxiety

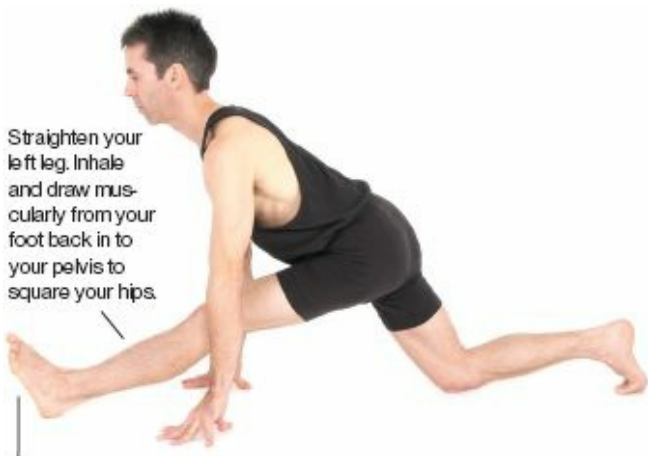
Contraindications

- ▶ Groin injury
- ▶ Knee or hamstring injury
- ▶ High or low blood pressure (do not raise hands overhead)



1 Kneel on the floor. Take a big step forward with your left leg and curl the toes of the back

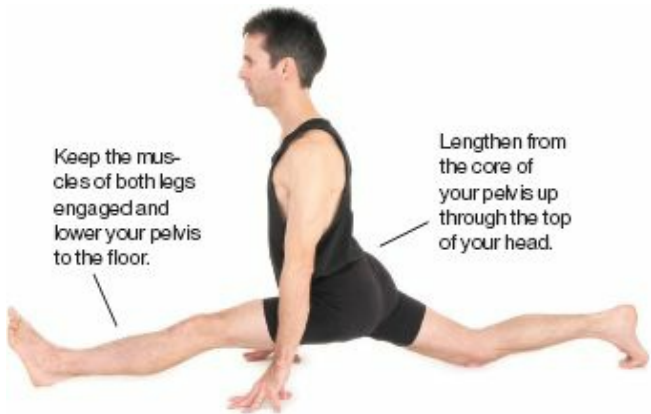
foot under.



Straighten your left leg. Inhale and draw muscularly from your foot back in to your pelvis to square your hips.

Maintain the engagement of the foot and calf muscles by spreading your toes and pressing through the ball of the big toe.

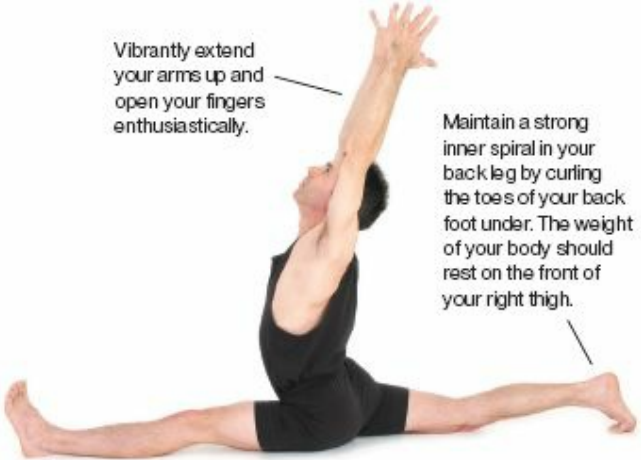
2 Place your fingertips on the floor.



3 Walk your hands back closer to your hips. Exhale, tuck your tailbone down and under, and extend from the core of your pelvis

out through both legs.

4 Inhale and draw from the feet into the pelvis again. Exhale, tuck your tailbone under again and extend from your pelvis out through the bones of the legs as you bring your hips all the way to the floor. Extend fully through your legs. Raise your arms over your head.



Vibrantly extend
your arms up and
open your fingers
enthusiastically.

Maintain a strong
inner spiral in your
back leg by curling
the toes of your back
foot under. The weight
of your body should
rest on the front of
your right thigh.

Firmly press both thighs
into the floor to gain more
lift in your torso.

**5 Release and repeat on
the other side.**

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4. Place your hands on blocks placed on either side of your thighs and keep your torso lifted and your spine straight.



chapter 9

Sitting Postures

Sitting and meditation postures are generally calming and nurturing, although some produce significant opening of the hip and require greater effort. They promote vitality when practiced with

proper alignment of the spine and pelvis. They improve circulation, reduce fatigue, center the mind, and soothe the nervous system. Sitting and meditation poses can be done at any time. Meditation poses should be practiced daily in conjunction with your asana practice.



Lotus

Padmasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens the hips
- ▶ Increases knee flexibility and lubricates the knee joints
- ▶ Prevents arthritis and osteoporosis
- ▶ Tones abdominal organs
- ▶ Promotes proper digestive system functions

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Focuses the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress
- ▶ Brings mental clarity

Contraindications

- ▶ Low back, hip, knee, or ankle injury (use the gentle variation)



1 Sit with your legs extended (Dandasana, [page 170](#)) and lengthen your spine from the tailbone up through the crown of your head.



2 Draw one heel to your navel, rotate your leg and foot outward, and place the top of your foot on top of your out-

stretched thigh at the hip crease.

Draw your knees closer together and press your toenails down into your thighs to engage your shins.



Keep the width in your pelvic floor as you root the tailbone down and under so that the buttocks flesh flows down in back.

3 Draw your other heel to your navel, rotate

your leg and foot outward, and place the top of your foot on top of your opposite thigh at the hip crease. Use your hands to broaden the base of your pelvic floor; that is, rotate your thighs and hips inward, one at a time, as you widen them out to the sides.



4 Inhale deeply and extend from your low belly up through the top of your head. Lengthen

up through the sides of your body, draw your shoulders back, and slide your shoulder blades down your back. Soften into the pose by relaxing your breath. Remain in the pose as long as desired.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through

4 except place only one foot in Lotus.



Looking Within

Padmasana With Sanmukhi Mudra

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Calms the nervous system

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Focuses the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress
- ▶ Brings mental clarity
- ▶ Blocks sensory input and removes external distractions

Contraindications

- ▶ Glaucoma
- ▶ Hearing aids (do not restrict ear canal while wearing)
- ▶ Corneal disease (place fingertips gently on eyelids instead of applying pressure)



1 Begin in Lotus (see **page 156**). Use your hands to broaden the base of your pelvic

floor; that is, rotate your thighs and hips inward, one at a time, as you widen them out to the sides.



2 Rest your fingers on your eyelids, applying slight pressure; continue with deep,

even breathing through your nose.

3 If desired, begin to close off your senses, one by one, going deeper into yourself. Place your thumbs in your ears to cut off external sounds. Place your first and second fingers on your eyes, distributing the gentle pressure evenly. Allow

your index fingers to softly pull your eyelids toward your eyebrows as the second fingers draw the eyelids closed. Shut both corners of your eyes. Use your third fingers to press your nostrils, and place your pinky fingers on your top lip to gauge rhythm of your breath.

Apply slight pressure to the top lip.

Press evenly onto the sides of your nostrils, narrowing the nasal passages.



4 When ready, lower your hands and release your legs.

Gentle Variation

Sit in Siddhasana variation (see page 176) and follow steps 2 through 4.



Baby Cradle

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches the thighs,

hamstrings, and calf muscles

- ▶ Creates proper engagement of the hamstrings
- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Massages the abdominal muscles
- ▶ Stimulates the colon, liver, and kidneys
- ▶ Opens the pelvic region

- ▶ Stimulates the reproductive and digestive systems

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Soothes the nervous system
- ▶ Develops mental focus
- ▶ Calms the mind

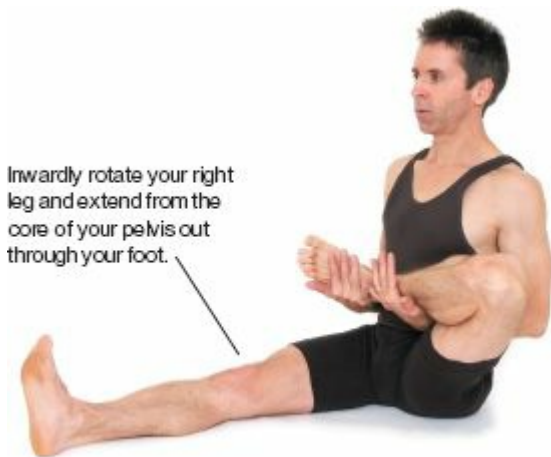
Contraindication

► Knee or hip injury



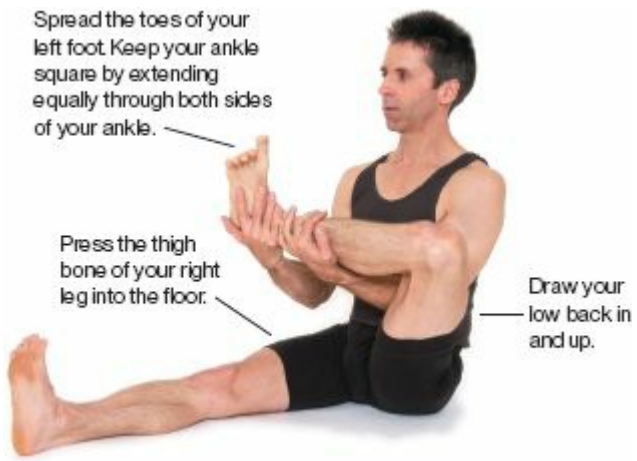
1 Sit with your legs extended. Press your

**hands into the floor to
lengthen your spine.**



**2 Bend your left leg and
draw your knee out to**

the side. Bring your hands underneath your leg, cradling your foot and lower shin.



Spread the toes of your left foot. Keep your ankle square by extending equally through both sides of your ankle.

Press the thigh bone of your right leg into the floor.

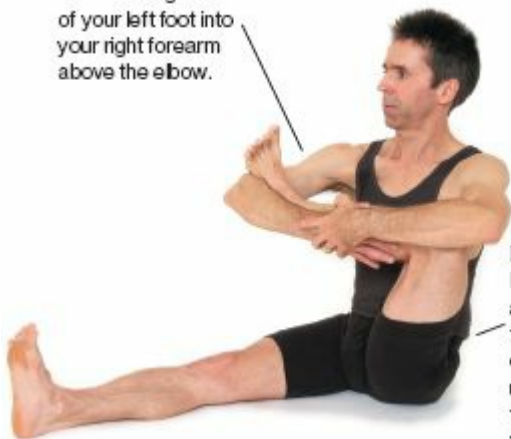
Draw your low back in and up.

3 Bring your left leg up and parallel to the floor.

4 Cradle your left foot in the elbow of your right arm. Wrap your left arm around the outside of your left knee and lower leg. Clasp your right wrist with your left hand. Inhale, and move your left knee slightly away from your body. Exhale, and draw your

**shin and foot in toward
your torso.**

Press the big-toe side
of your left foot into
your right forearm
above the elbow.



Draw your
lower back in
and extend
from the core
of your pelvis
up through
the crown of
your head

**5 Release and repeat on
the other side.**

Gentle Variation

Bend the knee of your bottom leg and draw the foot in close to your body.



Hero

Virasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha Svanasana)
- ▶ Seated Forward Bend
(Paschimottanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ At ceiling
- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens the lower back
- ▶ Improves the health and function of the hip, knee, and ankle joints
- ▶ Stimulates thyroid and parathyroid productivity

- ▶ Helps relieve menopausal discomfort
- ▶ Helps relieve high blood pressure

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Creates a feeling of grounding and stability
- ▶ Calms the mind

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee or ankle injury
(use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Arthritis (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Heart disease



1 Kneel on the floor.



2 Bring your forehead to the floor and place your hands on your calves behind your knees. Press your fingers into your calves with a steady pressure and slide your hands down

**toward your ankles to
flatten your calves
evenly.**



Keep your ankles
by the sides of
your hips.

Keep pressing
your toes into
the floor and hug
your ankles in
toward your hips.

3 Bring your buttocks to the floor and rest your hands on your thighs. Root your sitting bones down and lengthen from the core of your pelvis up through the crown of your head. Maintain a natural curve in your spine.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3 except sit on a folded blanket or bolster to elevate your hips.



Other Variations



Kneeling Pose

Bhujrasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stimulates circulation
- ▶ Energizes the thighs, calves, and ankles
- ▶ Aligns the spine
- ▶ Stretches the quadriceps
- ▶ Opens ankle, knee, and hip joints


Mental Benefits

- ▶ Calms the mind

- ▶ Soothes the nervous system

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee injury
- ▶ Ankle injury



Bring your
legs and
feet close
together.

Keep your lower legs
engaged by pressing
the tops of your toes
into the floor.

1 Kneel on the floor.



2 Sit down on your heels.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 2. Place a bolster or folded blankets underneath your hips.



Other Variation



Lion

Simhasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Child's Pose
(Balasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Relieves jaw tension
- ▶ Exercises the facial muscles
- ▶ Improves blood flow to the brain
- ▶ Increases circulation to the eyes and throat
- ▶ Clears nasal and ear passages

- ▶ Helps relieve sinusitis
- ▶ Increases lung capacity
- ▶ Relieves dry or sore throats

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Reduces stress, mild depression, and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Ankle or knee injury
(see gentle variation)
- ▶ Asthma
- ▶ Glaucoma
- ▶ Temporomandibular
joint syndrome (TMJ)



1 Kneel on the floor.



2 Point your toes and sit back on your heels.



3 Lean your torso forward and place your fingertips on the floor. Inhale deeply. On your next exhalation, let out an audible and long sigh. Repeat three

times, then relax.

Gentle Variation

Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position then follow step 3.

Other Variations



Cow Face

Gomukhasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens the knee, ankle, and shoulder joints
- ▶ Stretches the thighs, chest, and arms
- ▶ Opens the chest enabling deeper breathing
- ▶ Stretches the entire back
- ▶ Tones the abdominal

muscles and lower
back

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Improves focus
- ▶ Reduces stress, mild depression, and anxiety

Contraindications

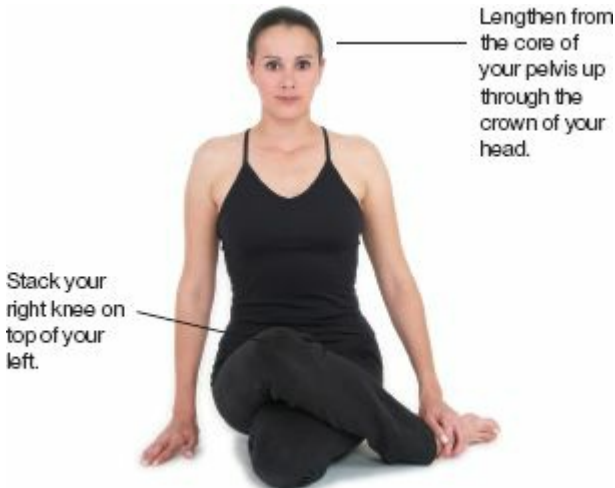
- ▶ Shoulder injury

- ▶ Ankle, knee, or hip injury (use the gentle variation)



1 Sit with your legs

extended. Press your hands into the floor and raise your buttocks. Bend your left leg back and sit on your left foot.



2 Bend your right leg and bring your right thigh on top of your left.



3 Either maintain the position of your left foot or lift your hips and move your foot outside

your right hip to bring both hips to the floor. Raise your left arm over your head and bend your elbow, resting your hand on your upper back. Bend your right arm, bring the forearm up your back, and clasp your hands together.

Draw muscularly from your left elbow back into your armpit hollowing your armpit back. Keeping the engagement, extend your elbow higher.



Press your head back into your arm keeping the chest open.

Lengthen up through the right side of your body and draw the right shoulder back.

Back view of hand clasp

4 Release and repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow the instructions

in steps 1 through 3. At step 3 place a bolster or folded blanket under your hips. Use a strap between your hands.



Staff Pose

Dandasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Seated Forward Bend (Paschimottanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Tones abdominal muscles
- ▶ Increases circulation
- ▶ Opens the chest
- ▶ Strengthens legs, torso, arms, and spine
- ▶ Improves muscular endurance of legs and lumbar spine

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Creates focus
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

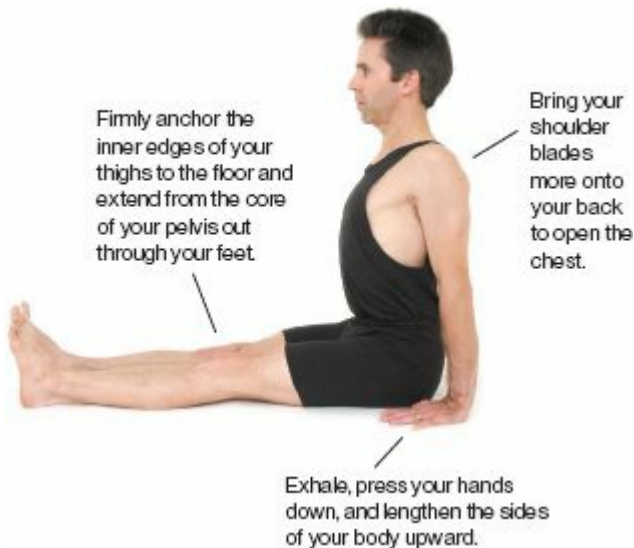
- ▶ None



1 Sit with your legs extended. Widen the pelvic floor by rotating your legs inward (the inseam of the leg moves down). Rotate the legs

inward by firmly holding the inside of your left thigh with your right hand and the outside of your left hip with your left hand. Rotate your thigh muscles inwardly by drawing the inseam of the thigh down and the outer hip up as you lean slightly to the right. Simultaneously widen the thigh and hip out to

the left side. Repeat on your right leg.



2 Press your hands into

**the floor to lengthen
your spine.**

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 and 2,
but place a bolster or
folded blankets under
your hips.



Yoga Sealing Pose

Yoga Mudrasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens hips and chest
- ▶ Increases knee flexibility
- ▶ Prevents arthritis and osteoporosis
- ▶ Promotes digestive and reproductive system health
- ▶ Stretches shoulders
- ▶ Stimulates intestines,

colon, and liver

- ▶ Relieves sciatica and menstrual discomfort

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress

Contraindications

- ▶ High or low blood pressure (do not bend

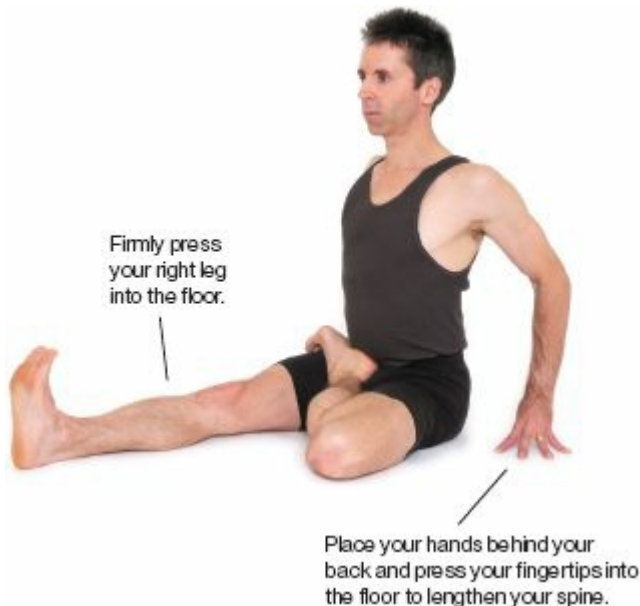
forward)

- ▶ Pregnancy (after the first trimester; do not bend forward)
- ▶ Groin or shoulder injury
- ▶ Knee or hip injury



1 Sit with your legs extended. Bend your left leg and bring your hands underneath your leg, cradling the foot

and lower shin.

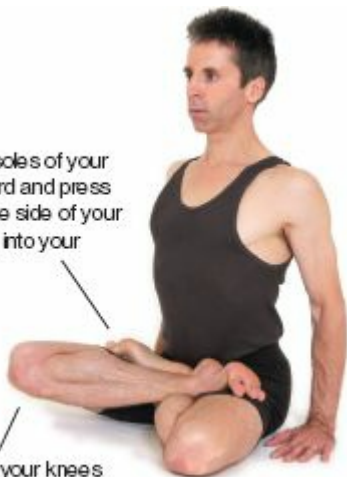


2 Fold your left leg into

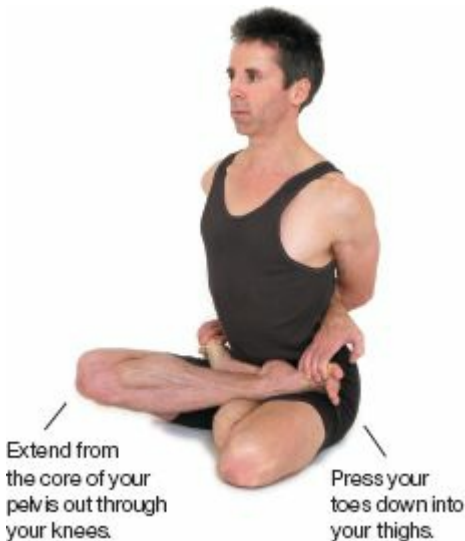
Half-Lotus by bringing your foot to the top of your right thigh crease.

Face the soles of your feet upward and press the little toe side of your feet down into your thighs.

Draw your knees closer together.



3 Bend your right leg and hold your right foot and ankle. Come to the full lotus pose by bringing your right foot up to the crease of your left thigh. Exhale, press your hands down, and extend from the core of your pelvis up through the crown of your head. Maintain a natural curve in your spine.



4 Exhale and bring your right arm behind your back and grab your big toe. Take a breath in,

lean your torso forward, exhale, swing your left arm around behind your back, and grab the other big toe.



5 Curl your head back, look up and take a few

breaths (see variation posture). Exhale and bend forward, resting your forehead on the floor. Release and repeat on the other side.

Other Variation



Heron

Krounchasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ At big toe

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches shoulders, chest, back, and hamstrings
- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Stimulates reproductive and lymphatic system
- ▶ Improves liver, kidney, uterus, and ovary function
- ▶ Relieves menstrual

and menopausal
discomfort

- ▶ Relieves backache
and fatigue

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress, mild
depression, and
anxiety

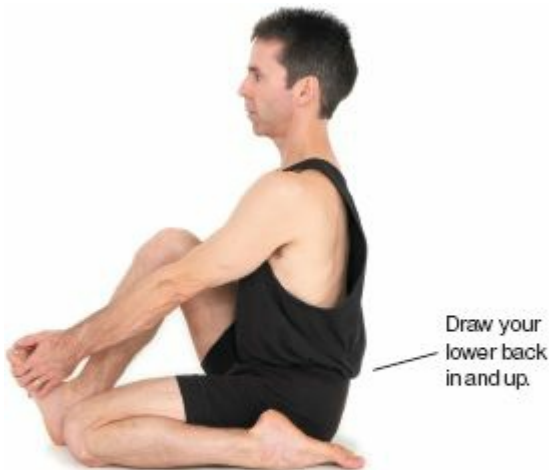
Contraindications

- ▶ Insomnia
- ▶ Asthma
- ▶ Pregnancy (after the first trimester)
- ▶ Knee or ankle injuries
- ▶ Hip injuries (use a folded blanket under hip for support)



1 Sit with your legs extended. Bend your left leg and rest your ankle by the side of your hip. Keep your knees

parallel. Press your hands into the floor. Root your sitting bones down into the floor and lengthen up through the spine.



Draw your
lower back
in and up.

Point your left foot back, firmly press
your toes into the floor, and hug your
left ankle in toward your hip.

**2 Bend your right knee
and hold your foot with
both hands.**

Fully extend
from the core
of your pelvis —
out through
your right leg.

Press your
right thigh bone
away from your
belly to engage
the hamstring
muscle.



3 Exhale and straighten your right leg up. Draw from your hands back through your arms to your shoulders, and

**hollow your armpits.
Bring your shoulder
blades onto your back.
Maintain this pose for a
few breaths.**

**4 Keep pressing your
right thigh away from
your belly, exhale, and
draw your right shin in
toward your body while
moving your torso and
head forward.**

Bring your
shin as close
to your face
as possible.

Widen your
elbows away
from each
other to draw
your leg in
deeper.



5 Release and repeat on the other side.

Gentle Variation

Follow only steps 1 through 3. Use a strap across the sole of your foot.

Sage

Siddhasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Staff (Dandasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Forward
- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Increases blood circulation in the lower spine
- ▶ Tones abdominal organs through breathing action
- ▶ Elongates the spine
- ▶ Opens the hips
- ▶ Strengthens the low and middle back

- ▶ Calms the nervous system

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Focuses the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress
- ▶ Brings mental clarity

Contraindications

- ▶ Low back, hip, knee, or ankle injury (use the

gentle variation)



1 Sit with your legs extended (Dandasana, page 170) as you

**lengthen your spine
from the tailbone up
through the crown of
your head.**



2 Bring the sole of your left foot to the inner edge of your right thigh with the heel in toward the perineum.

Keep the width in your pelvic floor as you tuck your tailbone down and under so that the buttocks flesh flows down in back.

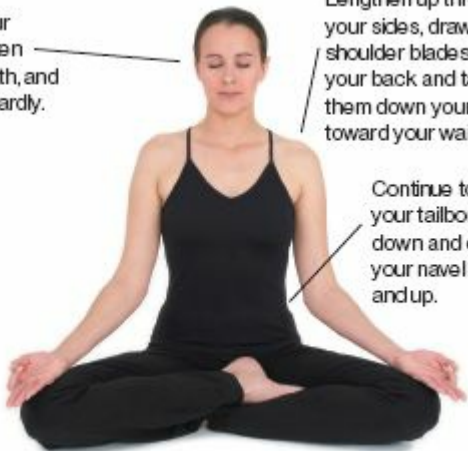


3 Gently bend your right leg and draw your heel in toward your body. Place the top of your right foot and ankle onto the left calf muscle. Use your hands to broaden the base of your pelvic floor; that is, rotate your thighs and hips inward, one at a time, as you widen them out to the sides.

Close your eyes, soften your breath, and focus inwardly.

Lengthen up through your sides, draw your shoulder blades onto your back and take them down your back toward your waist.

Continue to tuck your tailbone down and draw your navel in and up.



4 Rest your palms, face up, on your thighs, with your thumb and index fingers touching. Exhale and root down into the

floor with your sitting bones. Let your legs and pelvis be heavy. Inhale, and extend from the core of your low belly up through the crown of your head. Remain in the pose as long as desired.

Gentle Variation

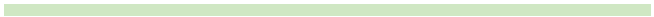
For low back tightness,

sit on the edge of a
folded blanket
throughout steps 1 to 4.



Other Variations— Hand Mudras

A *mudra* is a hand gesture that completes an energy circuit in the body and mind. They help to create a calming effect and to encourage different mental focus. More information is available in chapter 1, pages 25 to 26.





Gyana mudra



Gyana mudra



Gyana mudra



Dhyana mudra

chapter 10

Reclining and Relaxation Postures

Reclining poses are generally done as a cool down at the end of a practice. They reduce fatigue, increase mental clarity, and open spaces within the body that are

generally closed by tension. Each of the reclining poses in this chapter increases flexibility through the groins and hips, stimulates digestion and elimination, and strengthens and stretches the lower back and legs.

Relaxation poses soothe and balance the nervous system, offering

the body rest from physical activity. Child's pose is used throughout a practice whenever a rest is needed. Corpse pose is the quintessential restorative pose. It is typically performed at the end of a practice for deep relaxation and rejuvenation. The corpse pose is often regarded as the most difficult of poses

because it requires being still and receptive.

It is important to take time in both reclining and relaxation poses to breathe and completely embrace the sensations experienced when practicing them.



Knees-to-Chest

Apanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Corpse (Savasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Eyes closed
- ▶ Forward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches the spine and shoulders
- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Massages the abdominal organs and back
- ▶ Relieves lower back pain
- ▶ Opens the hips

Mental Benefit

- ▶ Relieves stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee injuries
- ▶ Hernia



1 Lie on the floor with your legs extended.

Point your feet
and keep your
toes together.

Place your
hands just below
your knees.



2 Bend your knees in toward your chest and separate your knees.



3 Draw your knees together and wrap your arms around your legs.



4 Roll to your right.

5 Roll to your left.



6 Repeat several times, then rest on your back or in Savasana ([page 196](#)).

Reclining Hero

Supta Virasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ At ceiling

- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens and releases the lower back
- ▶ Opens the chest for greater lung capacity
- ▶ Promotes the health and function of the hip, knee, and ankle joints
- ▶ Stimulates thyroid and parathyroid productivity

- ▶ Helps relieve menopausal discomfort
- ▶ Helps normalize high blood pressure
- ▶ Calms the nervous system

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Creates a feeling of grounding and stability
- ▶ Increases mental clarity

- ▶ Calms the mind

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee or ankle injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Arthritis (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Heart disease
- ▶ Pregnancy (after the first trimester use the gentle variation)

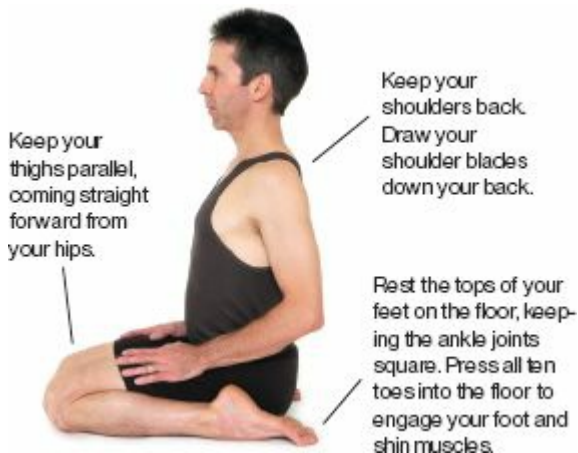


1 Standing on your knees, line up your feet and ankles straight back from your knees.



2 Smooth your calf muscles straight back with your hands, keeping even amounts of flesh on the insides and outsides of your legs. Rest your forehead on the floor if

necessary.



3 Sit down between your ankles and extend from your low belly up

**through your head.
Leave no space between
your inner ankles and
your hips.**



Rest the weight
of your torso on
your elbows.

**4 Walk your hands
behind you and slowly
recline onto your**

forearms.

Arch your pelvis slightly to create a curve in the low back. Then lengthen your tailbone and extend outward through your knees.



5 Lower your torso all the way onto the floor and extend your arms up and over your head, keeping your shoulders down. Hold for as long

as is comfortable. When you are ready, bring your arms down by your sides. Bend your elbows and slide them back to support your body weight. Draw your chin into your chest, press your elbows down, and bring your torso up. Stretch back into Downward-Facing Dog (see [page 30](#)).

Gentle Variation

See Supported Hero (page 192). Follow steps 1 through 6 except if you are able to sit all the way to the floor, place a bolster or several folded blankets under your back. If you cannot sit to the floor, place the bolster under your hips and back.



Other Variations



Reclining Big-Toe

Supta Padangusthasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ At ceiling
- ▶ At big toe

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stimulates prostate gland
- ▶ Improves digestion
- ▶ Stretches hips, calves, and thighs
- ▶ Opens the hamstrings and psoas muscles
- ▶ Strengthens the knees
- ▶ Relieves menstrual

and back discomfort

- ▶ Promotes reproductive health
- ▶ Strengthens arches of the feet
- ▶ Relieves sciatica and low back discomfort

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Relieves stress

Contraindications

- ▶ Headache
- ▶ High blood pressure
(use the gentle variation)



**1 Lie flat on the floor;
engage your legs and**

**spread your toes.
Anchor your upper
thighs into the floor as
firmly as possible. Arch
your low back slightly to
help get your thighs to
descend.**

Grab your big toe with your
first two fingers and thumb,
wrapping your fingers on
the inside of the toe.

Keep your right
thigh pressed
into the floor.



2 Bend your left knee and hold your big toe to the inside of your thigh.



Use your right hand to help keep your right thigh pressing down.

Press your shoulders into the floor and slide your shoulder blades down your back toward your waist.

3 While holding on to

**your big toe, extend
your left leg up, keeping
your right thigh
grounded into the floor.
Extend from your pelvis
through the sole of your
left foot and press your
left thigh away from
your belly into your
hamstrings.**

Gentle Variation

Follow the instructions in steps 1 through 3, but use a strap over the sole of your foot. Hold the end of the strap with one hand.



Reclining Bound-Angle

Supta Baddha Konasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Corpse (Savasana)
- ▶ Knees-to-Chest (Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation
- ▶ Keeps the prostate, kidneys, and urinary tract healthy
- ▶ Prevents varicose veins
- ▶ Promotes reproductive health

- ▶ Opens the chest
- ▶ Reduces fatigue and relieves headaches

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Helps draw the senses inward
- ▶ Relieves mild depression, stress, and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee or groin injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Low back pain (use the gentle variation)



1 Sit at the edge of a large flat bolster. Bring the soles of your feet together and let your knees fall to the side. Drape a strap around your low back and over your thighs, around the front of your body and under your feet. Thread the strap and tighten until it is comfortably supported across your

sacrum.



2 Slowly recline onto the bolster, adjusting the props as needed.



3 If desired, place a neck support or rolled towel under your neck and place an eye pillow across your closed eyes.



4 Relax into the pose and breathe slowly and evenly.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4, but place blankets or blocks under your knees or thighs to alleviate strain.



Reclining Open-Leg Spinal Twist

Jathara Parivartanasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Eyes closed

- ▶ Beyond extended fingertips

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Stretches the spine and shoulders
- ▶ Improves digestion and circulation
- ▶ Massages the abdominal organs
- ▶ Strengthens low back

- ▶ Relieves lower backache, neck pain, and sciatica
- ▶ Opens hips

Mental Benefit

- ▶ Helps relieve stress, mild depression, and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Low blood pressure
- ▶ Menstruation



1 Lie on your back and extend your legs.

Lengthen your outer
left hip away from
your left shoulder.



Tilt your sacrum
forward slightly to
arch your low back.

Anchor
your left
shoulder
onto the
floor.

**2 Draw your left leg up
and twist it across your
body, holding it with
your right hand.**

Lengthen your
tailbone down and
extend through
both legs.

Keep your left knee
down and twist your belly
and chest to the right.



3 To deepen the twist, bend your right leg and reach for your foot with your left hand, drawing the heel in toward your

hips.

Gentle Variation

Keep your legs together on the same side of your body.



Other Variation



Supported Bridge

Salamba Setu Bandha Sarvangasana

Counterpose

- ▶ **Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana)**

Drishti

- ▶ **At ceiling**

- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Alleviates low back discomfort
- ▶ Opens the heart, chest, neck, and spine
- ▶ Increases circulation in digestive and reproductive organs
- ▶ Stimulates pituitary, thyroid, and

parathyroid gland function

- ▶ Helps alleviate sciatica
- ▶ Relieves menstrual discomfort
- ▶ Helps relieve asthma, high blood pressure, and sinusitis

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Stimulates the nervous system

- ▶ Reduces stress, mild depression, and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Pregnancy (after the second trimester)
- ▶ Neck or spinal injury



1 With a straight spine, sit near the middle of two bolsters or blankets that have been stacked end to end.



2 Using your hands as support, begin to slowly lower your body down on to the bolsters.



3 Place your hands flat along the side of the support and gently begin to recline. Keep your shoulders, neck, and head on the floor.

Supported Hero

Supta Salamba Virasana

Counterpose

- ▶ Downward-Facing Dog
(Adho Mukha
Svanasana)

Drishti

- ▶ Eyes closed

- ▶ Upward

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Opens and releases the lower back
- ▶ Promotes the health and function of the hip, knee, and ankle joints
- ▶ Stimulates thyroid and parathyroid productivity
- ▶ Helps relieve menopausal discomfort

- ▶ Therapeutic for high blood pressure

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Creates a feeling of grounding and stability
- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress, mild depression and anxiety

Contraindications

- ▶ Knee or ankle injury (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Arthritis (use the gentle variation)
- ▶ Pregnancy (first trimester; use additional props)
- ▶ Heart disease
- ▶ Pregnancy (after the first trimester)

Align your thighs parallel to and directly in front of your hip sockets. Press the tops of your toes into the floor to engage your ankles, feet, and shins.



1 Bend your knees and sit on the floor with your heels at the outer edge of your hips. Place a large, flat bolster at

**the edge of your hips
behind your body.**



**2 Bend your elbows and
recline onto the bolster,
keeping your spine**

lengthened.

3 Rest on the bolster with your arms by your sides. Allow your shoulders to melt back around the bolster.

Keep your hips on the floor. Scoop your tailbone down and under and extend from your hips through your knees.

Relax your shoulders and open your chest.

Palms are face up and receptive.



4 Once supported, relax and melt into the pose, focusing on your breath.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 3 except place the bolster under your hips and back.

Child's Pose

Balasana

Drishti

- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Alleviates head, neck, and chest pain
- ▶ Opens the pelvic floor,

hips, and low back

- ▶ Stretches ankles, knees, and hips
- ▶ Opens the upper back

Mental Benefits

- ▶ Calms the mind
- ▶ Reduces stress
- ▶ Lessens fatigue

Contraindications

- ▶ Pregnancy (keep the knees apart and do not place pressure on the abdominal region)
- ▶ Ankle, knee, or hip injury



1 Sit on your heels with your shoulders above your hips.



Rest your forehead
on the floor, soften
your face.

**2 Bow forward and
gently place your chest
on your thighs.**

Lengthen the sides of your body by extending from your hips to your shoulders.

Relax your arms to the floor.



3 As an option, bring your arms forward. Walk your fingertips forward and away from your shoulders.

The prop should be heavy enough to feel, but light enough that it does not take away from your ability to relax and restore in the pose.



4 As an option, place a small sandbag or bolster on your low back. The pressure will relax your lower back

muscles.

Gentle Variation

Follow the instructions in steps 1 through 4 but use a bolster to support your torso adjusting it as needed. Separate your knees to accommodate the bolster.



Corpse *Savasana*

Drishti

- ▶ Eyes closed

Physical Benefits

- ▶ Lowers blood pressure
- ▶ Relaxes and rejuvenates the body

- ▶ Reduces fatigue

Mental Benefits

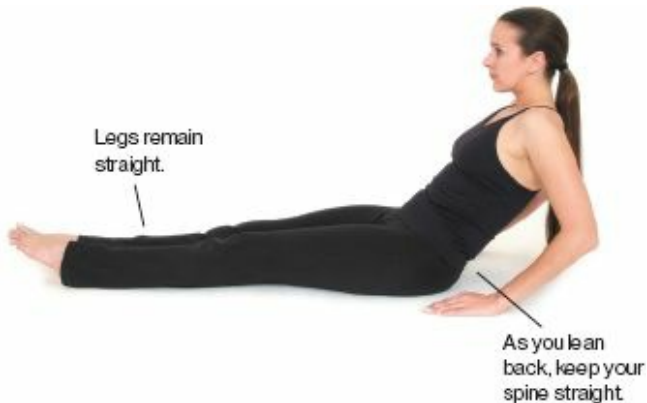
- ▶ Reduces stress, mild depression, and anxiety
- ▶ Reduces insomnia
- ▶ Calms and centers the mind

Contraindications

- ▶ Pregnancy (use the gentle variation or relax onto either side of the body with the knees drawn toward the chest)
- ▶ Low back or spinal injuries (use the gentle variation)



1 Sit with your legs extended and your hands by your sides.



2 Support yourself with your arms as you recline onto the floor.



3 Lie flat on your back.



4 Relax your legs and allow your toes to roll out toward either side of the body. Move your arms 12 to 15 inches away from your sides with your hands on the floor and your palms face up. Soften completely into the floor.

Gentle Variation

Follow steps 1 through 4, but place a bolster under your knees to support your low back.



chapter 11

Hatha Yoga Routines

The *yoga asanas* described in this book are of great benefit when practiced individually. Once you become familiar with the poses it is advantageous to do them in a sequential series.

This chapter introduces a series of asanas that collectively make up a routine similar to those you might experience in a yoga class. The routines provide a sequence or flow to your yoga practice that allows you to coordinate your breath with your movement. Along with conscious breath and movement

you'll gain a greater sensitivity to your physical and energy body and the relationship between them. It is this awareness that is the essence of alignment.

The routines also help to bring the whole practice together by making a mindful connection between one pose and the next. Yoga is not only

what happens during the pose but also what happens before and after the pose. Mindful movement from pose to pose will help you to center and make your yoga experience a moving meditation.

Please note that there are some poses in the routines that are not described in the text of

this book. Therefore, it is recommended that you master similar poses from the book where possible to prepare yourself for these routines.



Gentle Yoga I

The postures in this routine provide maximum relaxation and can be performed by yoga students of all levels. Perform the routine in a quiet room with no distractions. Remain in each pose as long as it feels comfortable. Pay

attention to your breath and notice the thoughts that will naturally flow in and out of your awareness like clouds floating in the sky. If you become distracted during your practice, return your attention to your breath. Conclude with Savasana (Corpse) for a minimum of 10 minutes. As you perform Gentle Yoga II on

the next page, rest in Savasana, on your stomach, or in Child's Pose if necessary before proceeding to the next pose.



Supported Corpse
Supported Savasana
page 196



Sage (variation)
Siddhasana
page 176



Gentle Spinal Twist

(variation)
page 122



Supported Forward Bend



Standing Forward Bend Uttanasana page 138



Supported Child's Pose Balasana page 194



Supported Bridge Salamba Setu Bandha Sarvangasana page 190



Supported Spinal Twist



Legs-Up-the-Wall Viparita Karani page 94



Reclining Bound-Angle Supta Baddha Konasana

page 186



Supported Corpse
Supported Savasana
page 196

Gentle Yoga II



Corpse
Savasana
page 196



Reclining Big-Toe
Supta Padangusthasana
page 184



Bridge
Setu Banda
Sarvangasana

page 106



Knees-to-Chest
Apanasana
page 180



Reclining Spinal Twist

Jathara

Parivartanasana

page 124



Staff Pose

Dandasana

page 170



Seated Forward Bend Paschimottanasana page 136



Lying on belly



Cobra (variation) Bhujangasana page 100



Child's Pose Balasana page 194



Pigeon
Eka Pada
Rajakapotasana
page 118



Staff Pose
Dandasana
page 170



Gentle Spinal Twist (variation) page 122



Mountain

Tadasana

page 28



Extended Triangle

Utthita Trikonasana

page 34



Corpse Savasana page 196

Yoga for Flexibility I

This routine includes postures to increase and maintain strength and flexibility. It starts with a standing series followed by hip openers, backbends, and a cool down. Coordinate the postures with your breath in the same manner as in

the salutation series (see
pages 210 to 216).



Mountain
Tadasana
page 28



Mountain (arms up)
Tadasana
page 28



Standing Forward Bend

Uttanasana

page 138



Lunge



Downward-Facing Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Cobra (variation)

Bhujangasana

page 100



Cobra

Bhujangasana

page 100



Downward-Facing Dog

Adho Mukha

Svanasana

page 30



Lunge



Standing Forward Bend
Uttanasana

page 138



Mountain
(arms overhead)
Tadasana
page 28



Mountain
(hands in Namaste)
Tadasana
page 28



Extended Triangle Utthita Trikonasana page 34



Revolved Triangle Parivrtta Trikonasana page 44



Staff Pose Dandasana page 170



Cow Face
Gomukhasana
page 168



Child's Pose
Balasana
page 194



Cat
page 116



Cow
page 116



Camel
Ustrasana
page 104



Bridge
Setu Banda

Sarvangasana

page 106



Intense front body stretch, Inclined Plane Purvottanasana

page 78



Fish Matsyasana page 114



Seated Spinal Twist I (variation) Marichysana I page 130



Staff Pose
Dandasana
page 170



Seated Forward Bend
Paschimottasana
page 136



Corpse Savasana page 196

Yoga for Flexibility II

This routine includes postures to increase and maintain flexibility. It starts slowly building in intensity, peaks with challenging backbends, and ends with cooling postures. Coordinate the postures with your breath in the same manner as in the

salutation series (see
pages 210 to 216).



Child's Pose
Balasana
page 194



Exhale, Cat

page 116



Inhale, Cow
page 116



Exhale, Downward-Facing

Dog Adho Mukha Svanasana page 30



Inhale, Plank



Exhale, Four-Limbed Staff

Chaturanga Dandasana

page 86



Exhale, Cobra, inhale
Bhujangasana
page 100



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Inhale, Camel

Ustrasana

page 104



Inhale, Bridge, exhale
Setu Banda
Sarvangasana
page 106



Inhale, Upward-Facing
Bow

Urdva Dhanurasana, exhale page 112



Inhale, Fish, exhale Matsyasana page 114



Exhale, cross-legged
Seated Spinal Twist I
(variation)

Marichyasana I
page 130



Inhale, Staff Pose
Dandasana
page 170



Exhale, Seated Forward
Bend, inhale
Paschimottanasana
page 136



Exhale, Corpse
Savasana
page 196

Vinyasa Yoga I

Vinyasa Yoga I, II, and III are excellent routines for building strength and stamina. Concentrate on ujjayi breathing to center yourself and link the poses together. Perform the sequence first for the right side, then repeat for the left side.



Mountain
(hands in Namaste)
Tadasana
page 28



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)
Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Standing Forward Bend Uttanasana page 138



Inhale, lengthen the spine



Exhale, Four-Limbed Staff Chaturanga Dandasana page 86



Inhale, Upward-Facing Dog Urdhva Mukha Svanasana page 102



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Inhale, Warrior I
Virabhadrasana I
page 40



Exhale, Warrior III
Virabhadrasana III
page 70



Inhale, Warrior I
Virabhadrasana I
page 40



Exhale, Four-Limbed Staff
Chaturanga Dandasana

page 86



Inhale, Upward-Facing
Dog

Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

page 102



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Exhale, Standing

Forward Bend

Uttanasana

page 138



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Mountain
(hands in Namaste)

Tadasana

page 28

Vinyasa Yoga II

The Vinyasa Yoga II routine combines salutation flow with powerful standing poses to build strength and endurance. Concentrate on ujjayi breathing to link the poses together. Perform the sequence first for the right side, then

repeat for the left side.



Mountain
(hands in Namaste)
Tadasana
page 28



Exhale, Mountain
(arms at sides)
Tadasana
page 28



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Chair, inhale
Utkatasana
page 46



Exhale, Standing

Forward Bend

Uttanasana

page 138



Inhale, lengthen the spine



Exhale, Plank, inhale



Exhale, Four-Limbed Staff
Chaturanga Dandasana
page 86



Inhale, Upward-Facing
Dog

Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

page 102



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Inhale, Warrior I
Virabhadrasana I
page 40



Exhale, Warrior II Virabhadrasana II

page 36



Inhale, Warrior I Virabhadrasana I

page 40



Exhale, Plank, inhale



Exhale, Four-Limbed Staff
Chaturanga Dandasana

page 86



Inhale, Upward-Facing
Dog
Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
page 102



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog
Adho Mukha Svanasana
page 30



Inhale, step the feet to
the hands and lengthen
the spine



Exhale, Standing
Forward Bend

Uttanasana

page 138



Inhale, Chair, exhale
Utkatasana
page 46



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Mountain
(hands in Namaste)

Tadasana

page 28

Vinyasa Yoga III

Vinyasa Yoga III is an excellent routine designed to build strength and stamina with a focus on twists. Concentrate on ujjayi breathing to link the poses together. Perform the sequence first for the right side, then repeat for the left side.



Inhale, Mountain
(hands in Namaste)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Mountain
(arms at sides)

Tadasana

page 28



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Standing Forward Bend Uttanasana page 138



Inhale, lengthen the spine



Exhale, Plank, inhale



Exhale, Four-Limbed Staff
Chaturanga Dandasana
page 86



Inhale, Upward-Facing
Dog

Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

page 102



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Inhale, Lunge



Inhale, Revolved Intense
Side-Stretch
Parivrtta Parsvakonasana
page 54



Inhale, place the hands
on the ground, lift the
opposite leg up



Exhale, inhale,

Revolved Half Moon Parivrtta Ardha Chandrasana page 66



Exhale, bring both
hands down under the
shoulders



Inhale, exhale, Lunge



Inhale, Plank



Exhale, Four-Limbed Staff

Chaturanga Dandasana

page 86



Inhale, Upward-Facing
Dog
Urdhva Mukha
Svanasana
page 102



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana
page 30



Inhale, step the feet to
the hands and lengthen

the spine



Exhale, Standing
Forward Bend
Uttanasana

page 138



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Mountain
(hands in Namaste)

Tadasana

page 28

Sun Salutation I

Sun Salutation I is an excellent warm-up routine for most yoga practices or to start your day. It is also an excellent stand alone routine that can be completed in about a minute. Concentrate on the breathing throughout the routine. Once you

have completed the series with one leg, repeat using the other leg.



Mountain
Tadasana
page 28



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)
Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Standing Forward Bend Uttanasana page 138



Exhale, Lunge



Inhale, Plank



Inhale, exhale, Cobra Bhujangasana page 100



Exhale, Cobra Bhujangasana

page 100



Inhale, exhale, Cobra
Bhujangasana
page 100



Inhale, Cobra
Bhujangasana

page 100



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Inhale, Lunge



Exhale, Standing Forward
Bend

Uttanasana

page 138



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Mountain
(hands in Namaste)

Tadasana

page 28

Sun Salutation II

Sun Salutation II is also an excellent warm-up routine for most yoga practices and can serve as a stand alone routine for building stamina, strength, and flexibility. It can be completed in about a minute. Concentrate on ujjayi breathing to link the

poses together.



Exhale, Mountain
Tadasana
page 28



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Standing
Forward Bend
Uttanasana
page 138



Inhale, lengthen the spine



Exhale, Four-Limbed Staff
Chaturanga Dandasana
page 86



Inhale, Upward-Facing
Dog
Urdhva Mukha Svanasana
page 102



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog Adho Mukha
Svanasana
page 30



Inhale, lengthen the spine



Exhale, Standing
Forward Bend
Uttanasana
page 138



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)
Tadasana [page 28](#)



Exhale, Mountain
(hands in Namaste)
Tadasana
[page 28](#)

Moon Salutation I

This is primarily a back-bending salutation. Coordinate your movements with your breath. If you need to rest, remain in Child's Pose for 10 breaths before continuing with the series. This series is shown leading with the right side.

Complete the entire series
and then repeat leading
with your left side.



Exhale, Mountain
Tadasana
page 28



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Standing Forward
Bend

Uttanasana

[page 138](#)



Inhale, Garland (variation)

Malasana

[page 150](#)



Exhale, place your hands
down, Lunge



Inhale, Crescent Lunge,
(variation) Alanasana
page 38



Exhale, Lunge



Inhale, Camel (variation)
Ustrasana

page 104



Exhale, Child's
Pose Balasana
page 194



Inhale, forward Cobra
Bhujangasana
page 100



Exhale, Child's Pose
Balasana
page 194



Inhale, Camel (variation),
exhale

Ustrasana

page 104



Inhale, Crescent Lunge,
(variation)
Alanasana
page 38



Exhale, Lunge



Inhale, Garland (variation)

Malasana

page 150



Exhale, Standing
Forward Bend
Uttanasana
page 138



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Mountain
(hands in Namaste)

Tadasana

Moon Salutation II

This is a full range series incorporating forward-, side-, and back-bending poses. Coordinate your movements with ujjayi breathing. If you need to rest, remain in Child's Pose for 10 breaths before continuing with the series.



Exhale, Mountain
Tadasana
page 28



Inhale, Mountain
(thumbs linked together,
arms overhead)

Tadasana
page 28



Exhale, bow to the other
side
and slightly forward.



Inhale, Mountain
(thumbs linked together,
arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, bow to the other side and slightly forward.



Inhale, Mountain

(thumbs linked together,
arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, step wide
with arms at the side,
and inhale.



Exhale, Standing
Intense Spread-Leg
Pose

Prasarita
Padottanasana

page 48



Inhale, lift the torso



Exhale, Intense Side
Stretch

Parsvottanasana

page 54



Inhale, lift the torso



Exhale, Intense Side
Stretch

Parsvottanasana

page 54



Inhale, lift the torso,
exhale



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)

Tadasana

page 28



Exhale, Standing Forward
Bend, inhale

Uttanasana

page 138



Exhale, step back,
inhale, arms up



Exhale, bring the left
leg, kneel, inhale, reach
up, and arch the back,
Camel (variation)

Ustrasana

page 104



Exhale, step the right
foot forward, inhale,
arms up



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Inhale, lift your right leg
up in line with your spine
Downward-Facing Dog

(variation)

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana

page 30



Inhale, lift your left leg
up in line with your spine
Downward-Facing Dog
(variation)

Adho Mukha Svanasana
page 30



Exhale, Downward-Facing
Dog

Adho Mukha Svanasana
page 30



Inhale, Upward-Facing
Dog

Urdhva Mukha Svanasana

page 102



Exhale, Child's Pose

Balasana

page 194



Inhale, Garland (variation)

Malasana

page 150



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)
Tadasana
page 28



Exhale, Standing
Forward Bend
Uttanasana
page 138



Inhale, lengthen the spine



Exhale, Standing Forward
Bend

Uttanasana

page 138



Inhale, Mountain
(arms overhead)
Tadasana [page 28](#)



Exhale, Mountain (hands
in Namaste)
Tadasana
[page 28](#)

Suggested Readings

Baptiste, Baron. 2002.
Journey Into Power. New
York: Fireside.

Bouanchaud, Bernard.
1997. *The Essence of
Yoga*. Portland: Rudra
Press.

Browning-Miller, Elise,
and Carol Blackman.

1999. *Life Is a Stretch*.
St. Paul: Llewellyn.

Desikachar, T.K.V. 1995.
The Heart of Yoga.
Rochester, NY: Inner
Traditions International.

Durgananda, Swami.
2001. *The Heart of
Meditation*. South
Fallsburg, NY: Siddha
Yoga.

Frawley, David. 1999.

Yoga & Ayurveda. Twin
Lakes, WI: Lotus Press.

Hirschi, Gertrude. 2000.
*Mudras: Yoga in Your
Hands*. Boston, MA: Red
Wheel/Weiser.

Iyengar, B.K.S. 1977.
*Light on Yoga: Yoga
Dipika*. New York:
Schoken Books.

Iyengar, B.K.S. 1992.
Light on Pranayama:

The Yogic Art of Breathing. New York: Crossroads.

Judith, Anodea. 2002. *Wheels of Life: A Users Guide to the Chakra System.* St. Paul: Llewellyn.

Khalsa, Dharma Singh, and Cameron Stauth. 2001. *Meditation as Medicine.* New York:

Simon & Schuster.

Lad, Dr. Vasant. 1984.
*Ayurveda—The Science
of Self-Healing.* Twin
Lakes, WI: Lotus Press.

Lasater, Judith. 1995.
Relax and Renew.
Berkeley: Rodmell
Press.

LeShan, Lawrence. 1974.
How to Meditate. New
York: Little, Brown &

Company.

Mehta, Silva, et al. 1990.
Yoga: The Iyengar Way.
New York: Knopf.

Olivelle, Patrick. 1996.
Upanishads. New York:
Oxford University Press.

Schifman, Erich. 1996.
*Yoga: The Spirit and
Practice of Moving Into
Stillness.* New York:
Pocket.

Resources

Yoga Schools—North American Headquarters

Ananda Yoga

J. Donald Walters

(Kriyananda), founder

14618 Tyler Foote Rd.

Nevada City, CA 95959

(800) 346-5350

[**www.expandinglight.org**](http://www.expandinglight.org)

Ashtanga Yoga

Sri Pattabi Jois, founder

David Swenson, Ashtanga

Yoga Productions

P.O. Box 5099

Austin, TX 78763

In USA: (800) 684-6927

In Canada: (604) 732-
6111

[**www.ashtanga.net**](http://www.ashtanga.net)

Babaji's Kriya Hatha
Yoga

Marshall

Govindan,

founder

196 Mountain Rd., P.O.
Box 90

Eastman, Quebec,
Canada J0E 1P0

(888) 252-YOGA

www.babaji.ca

Baptiste Power Yoga
Institute

Baron Baptiste, founder
P.O. Box 400279

Cambridge, MA 02140
(617) 441-2144

www.baronbaptiste.com

Bikram Yoga

Bikram Choudhury,
founder

1862 S. La Cienega Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90035
(310) 854-5800

www.bikramyoga.com

Himalayan Institute

Swami Rama, founder
RR1 Box 1127

Honesdale, PA 18431-
9706

(800) 822-4547

[**www.himalayaninstitute.org**](http://www.himalayaninstitute.org)

Integral Yoga Institute
Sri Swami Satchidananda,
founder

Route 1, Box 1720

Buckingham, VA 23921

(434) 969-3121

[**www.yogaville.org**](http://www.yogaville.org)

Iyengar Yoga Institute of
San Francisco

B.K.S. Iyengar, founder

2404 27th Ave.

San Francisco, CA 94116
(415) 753-0909
www.iyisf.org

International Sivananda
Yoga Vedanta Centers
Swami Vishnu-devananda,
founder

5178, St-Laurent Blvd.
Montreal, Canada H2T
1R8

Quebec, Canada

In USA: (800) 783-YOGA

In Canada: (800) 263-

YOGA

[**www.sivananda.org**](http://www.sivananda.org)

Kripalu Center

P.O. Box 793

Lenox, MA 01240

(800) 741-7353

[**www.kripalu.org**](http://www.kripalu.org)

3HO Kundalini Yoga

Centers

Yogi Bhajan, founder

01A Ram Das Guru Place

Espanola, NM 87532

[**www.yogibhajan.com**](http://www.yogibhajan.com)

Mount Madonna Center
Baba Hari Dass, founder
445 Summit Rd.

Watsonville, CA 95076
(408) 847-0406

[**www.mountmadonna.org**](http://www.mountmadonna.org)

Tri Yoga
Kali Ray, founder
P.O. Box 6367

Malibu, CA 90264
(310) 589-0600

[**www.kaliraytriyoga.com**](http://www.kaliraytriyoga.com)

White Lotus Yoga

Ganga White, founder
2500 San Marcos Pass
Santa Barbara, CA 93105
(805) 964-1944
www.whitelotus.org

Sources for Yoga Props and Clothing

*Most of the yoga supplies
used for this book were
obtained from Hugger
Mugger Yoga Products.*

Hugger Mugger Yoga

Products

3937 South 500 West
Salt Lake City, UT 84123
(800) 473-4888

www.huggermugger.com

*Other sources for yoga
supplies:*

Asana

2118 Wilshire Blvd., Suite
850

Santa Monica, CA 90403
(888) 511-1144

asana2@earthlink.net

Bheka yoga supplies
(800) 366-4541
www.bheka.com

Blue Lotus Yoga
Essentials
3120 Central Ave. SE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
(888) 645-4452
www.bluelotusyoga.com

The Sitting Room
(zafus and meditation
supplies)
P.O. Box 885044

San Francisco, CA 94188
(800) 720-9642

[**www.yogamats.com**](http://www.yogamats.com)

Tools for Yoga
P.O. Box 99
Chatham, NJ 07928
(973) 966-5311

[**www.yogapropshop.com**](http://www.yogapropshop.com)

Yoga Pro
P.O. Box 7612
Ann Arbor, MI 48107
(800) 488-8414

[**www.yogapro.com**](http://www.yogapro.com)

YogaSuperStore.com
6947 California St.
San Francisco, CA 94121
(866) 300-5298
www.yogasuperstore.com

Yoga Zone
3342 Melrose Ave. NW
Roanoke, VA 24017
(800) 264-9642
www.yogazone.com

Index of Asanas

Photographic Index by English Name



Baby Cradle 10



**Beam (Parigha)
50**



**Boat (Navasan)
Bound Half-Lo**



Twist
(Bharadvajasa
128



Bow (Dhanura
108



Bridge (Setu B
Sarvangasana)



Camel (Ustras
104



Cat–Cow 116



Chair (Utkatasana)



**Child's Pose
(Balasana) 194**



**Cobra
(Bhujangasana)**



**Corpse (Savasana)
196**



**Cow Face
(Gomukhasana)**



Crane (Bakasana)



**Crescent Lung
(Alanasana) 38**



**Dancer (Nataraj)
72**



**Downward-Facing
Dog (Adho Muktasana)
Svanasana) 30**



Eagle (Garudasana) 58



**Extended Side
(Utthita
Parsvakonasana)**



Fish (Matsyasana)



**Four-Limbed Staff
(Chaturanga
Dandasana) 86**



Garland (Malasana) 150



**Gentle Spinal
122**



**Half-Moon (Arc
Chandrasana)**



**Head Stand (S
96**



**Head-to-Knee
Forward Bend
Sirsasana) 140**



Hero (Virasana)



**Heron
(Krounchasana)**



Humble Warrior



**Inclined Plane
(Purvottanasana)**



**Intense Side-S
(Parsvottanasana)**



**Kneeling Pose
(Bhujrasana) 1**



**Knees-to-Chest
(Apanasana) 1**



**Lateral Incline
(Vasisthasana)**



**Legs-Up-the-W
(Viparita Karar**



Lion (Simhasa



Locust (Salabha)
110



Looking Within
(Padmasana W)
Sanmukhi Mudra



Lotus (Padmasana)
156



Mountain (Tadasana)
28



Open-Angle
(Upavistha Konasana)

144

Peacock (Mayu
84



Pigeon (Eka Pa
Rajakapotasana



Plow (Halasana



Reclining Big-
(Supta



Padangusthas
184

Reclining Bou
Angle (Supta E





Konasana) 186
Reclining Hero
Virasana) 182



Reclining Open
Spinal Twist (J
Parivartanasar



Reclining Spin
Twist (Jathara
Parivartanasar



Revolved Exte
Side-Angle (Pa
Parsvakonasar



**Revolved Half-
(Parivrtta Ardha
Chandrasana)**



**Revolved Head-
to-Knee Forward
(Parivrtta Janu
Sirsasana) 142**



**Revolved Triangle
(Parivrtta Triko
44**



**Sage (Siddhas
176**



**Seated Forward
(Paschimottasana)
136**



**Seated Spinal
(Marichyasana)**



**Seated Spinal
(Marichyasana)**



**Shoulder Stand
(Sarvangasana)**



**Side Open-Angle
(Parsva Upavistha)**



Konasana) 146
Simple Sitting
(Bharadvajasa
126



Splits
(Hanumanasana



Staff Pose
(Dandasana) 1



Standing External
Leg Stretch (U
Hasta
Padangusthasana)



**Standing Forward
Bend (Uttanasana)
138**



**Standing Intense
Spread-Leg Pigeon
(Prasarita
Padottanasana)**



**Supported Bridge
(Salamba Setu
Bandha
Sarvangasana)**

Supported Her



(Supta Salambh
Virasana) 192
Three-Limb Inverted
Triangle Pose
Stretch (Triangula
Mukaikapada
Paschimottana)
148



Tiptoe Pose 62



Tree (Vrksasar



**Triangle (Utthita
Trikonasana) 3**



**Upward-Facing
(Urdhva Dhanurasana) 112**



**Upward-Facing
(Urdhva Mukha Svanasana) 10**

Warrior I



(Virabhadrasana I)



Warrior II
(Virabhadrasana II)



Warrior III
(Virabhadrasana III)
70



Yoga Sealing Pose
(Yoga Mudrasana)

Alphabetical by Sanskrit Name

Adho Mukha Svanasana
(Downward-Facing Dog)
30

Alanasana (Crescent
Lunge) 38

Apanasana (Knees-to-
Chest) 180

Ardha Chandrasana

(Half-Moon) 74

Bakasana (Crane) 82

**Balasana (Child's Pose)
194**

**Bharadvajasana I
(Simple Sitting Twist)
126**

**Bharadvajasana II
(Bound Half-Lotus
Twist) 128**

**Bhujangasana (Cobra)
100**

Bhujrasana (Kneeling Pose) 164

Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff) 86

Dandasana (Staff Pose) 170

Dhanurasana (Bow) 108

Eka Pada

Rajakapotasana (Pigeon) 118

Garudasana (Eagle) 58

Gomukhasana (Cow

Face) 168

Halasana (Plow) 92

**Hanumanasana (Splits)
152**

**Janu Sirsasana (Head-
to-Knee Forward Bend)
140**

**Jathara Parivartanasana
(Reclining Open-Leg
Spinal Twist and
Reclining Twist) 188**

Krounchasana (Heron)

174

Malasana (Garland) 150

**Marichyasana I (Seated
Spinal Twist I) 130**

**Marichyasana II (Seated
Spinal Twist II) 132**

Matsyasana (Fish) 114

**Mayurasana (Peacock)
84**

**Natarajasana (Dancer)
72**

Navasana (Boat) 64

Padmasana (Lotus) 156

**Padmasana With
Sanmukhi Mudra
(Looking Within) 158**

Parighasana (Beam) 50

**Parivrtta Ardha
Chandrasana (Revolved
Half-Moon) 66**

**Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana
(Revolved Head-to-Knee
Forward Bend) 142**

Parivrtta

Parsvakonasana

**(Revolved Extended
Side-Angle) 42**

Parivrtta Trikonasana
(Revolved Triangle) 44

Parsva Upavistha
**Konasana (Side Open-
Angle) 146**

Parsvottanasana
(Intense Side-Stretch) 54

Paschimottanasana
(Seated Forward Bend)

136

Prasarita Padottanasana
(Standing Intense
Spread-Leg Pose) 48

Purvottanasana
(Inclined Plane) 78

Salabhasana (Locust)
110

Salamba Setu Bandha
Sarvangasana
(Supported Bridge) 190

Sarvangasana (Shoulder

Stand) 90

Savasana (Corpse) 196

Setu Banda

Sarvangasana (Bridge)

106

Siddhasana (Sage) 176

Simhasana (Lion) 166

Sirasana (Head Stand)

Supta Baddha

Konasana (Reclining Bound-Angle) 186

**Supta Padangusthasana
(Reclining Big-Toe) 184**

**Supta Salamba Virasana
(Supported Hero) 192**

**Supta Virasana
(Reclining Hero) 182**

Tadasana (Mountain) 28

Triang Mukaikapada

Paschimottanasana

**(Three-Limb Intense
Stretch) 148**

Upavistha Konasana

(Open-Angle) 144

Urdva Dhanurasana
(Upward-Facing Bow)
112

Urdhva Mukha
Svanasana (Upward-
Facing Dog) 102

Ustrasana (Camel) 104

Utkatasana (Chair) 46

Uttanasana (Standing
Forward Bend) 138

Utthita Hasta

Padangusthasana
(Standing Extended-Leg
Stretch) 68

Utthita Parsvakonasana
(Extended Side-Angle)
32

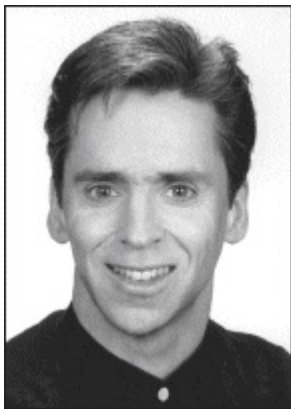
Utthita Trikonasana
(Triangle) 34

Vasisthasana (Lateral
Inclined Plane) 80

Viparita Karani (Legs-
Up-the-Wall) 94

Virabhadrasana (Warrior I) 40	I
Virabhadrasana (Warrior II) 36	II
Virabhadrasana (Warrior III) 70	III
Virasana (Hero) 162	
Vrksasana (Tree) 60	
Yoga Mudrasana (Yoga Sealing Pose) 172	

About the Authors



© Foto Fascination by Jorgen

Martin Kirk, MSBME, E-RYT 500 is a certified

yoga instructor who offers workshops and teacher trainings globally and online. With a Master's Degree in Biomedical Engineering, he has a special gift for anatomy and therapeutics creating worldwide demand for his trainings. Martin has also studied closely with Professor Douglas Brooks, one of the world's

foremost scholars of Hindu Tantrism. He has transitioned from a successful 20-year career as an engineer in the space industry to teaching and sharing his passion for yoga anatomy and therapy full-time. Martin instills excellence in all of his practice and teaching of yoga. He lives in Scottsdale, Arizona, with

his wife, Jordan and their son, Jonathan. He can be contacted via the Web at www.kirkyoga.com or by e-mail at martin@kirkyoga.com.



© Donna Hickney

Brooke Boon, RYT, is the founder and program director of Holy Yoga. She is an energetic and dedicated lover of yoga, healing, and the Lord. She creatively weaves spirituality, physical alignment, practical wisdom, and the Word into the fabric of her teaching. She has been blessed with the

opportunity to be a leader
in the Christian Yoga
Movement while
developing, branding, and
implementing Holy Yoga
classes across the
country. Brooke has
created and begun
facilitating the Holy Yoga
teacher training program
which trains devoted
teachers to inspire
students to connect

individually with Christ.

Brooke has a deep appreciation for the practice of yoga and connection to Christ as a collective and authentic path to wellness. “The love of the Lord and His Word has given this practice its power, flow, and grace. It is like nothing I have ever taught or been taught. It is a true

form of worship.”

Brooke lives in Phoenix, Arizona with her husband, Jarrett, and three children, Jory, Jace, and Brynn. You can connect with Brooke at www.hollyyoga.net or by calling 866-737-HOLY.



© Jim Adair

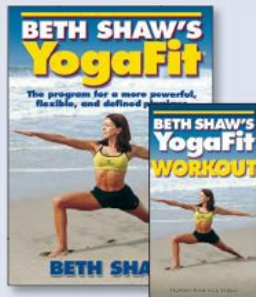
Daniel DiTuro was born in Phoenix, Arizona, and is a graduate of Arizona State University with a bachelor's degree in

mechanical engineering. He has worked as a mechanical engineer since 1980. He developed an interest in the arts and photography at an early age and in 1986 started DiTuro Photography (www.diturophotography.cc) specializing in commercial and portrait photography.

Following a shoulder injury in 1999, Daniel

began practicing hatha yoga. Having discovered the therapeutic benefits and the misconceptions about this East Indian philosophy, he began working on a series of yoga and meditation photographs that evolved into the Yoga Project (www.diturophotography.cc)

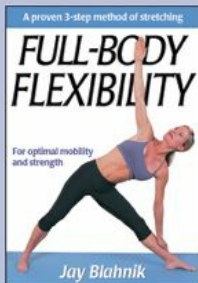
Create a total body workout!



Take the physical challenges of fitness-based yoga one step further with *Beth Shaw's YogaFit* products.

The book presents more than 50 YogaFit poses organized into well-rounded workouts, and provides information on creating personalized routines. The companion video then takes you step-by-step through a YogaFit workout, and includes tips on modifying the poses to suit your specific needs.

232 pages • ISBN 0-7360-3337-8
43-minute video • ISBN 0-7360-3338-6



Complement your yoga training with *Full-Body Flexibility*. This advanced stretching system will help you attain maximum flexibility by challenging muscles with multiple techniques, strengthening muscles so that they can support the body throughout specific moves in the entire range of motion, and balancing muscles equally in opposing muscle groups and on both sides of the body.

216 pages • ISBN 0-7360-4150-8

To place your order, U.S. customers call

TOLL FREE 800-747-4457

In Canada call 800-465-7301 • In Australia call 08 8277 1555

In New Zealand call 0664 9 448 1207 • In Europe call +44 (0) 113 255 5665

or visit www.HumanKinetics.com



HUMAN KINETICS

The Premier Publisher for Sports & Fitness
P.O. Box 5076, Champaign, IL 61825-5076

Table of Contents

Title Page	2
Copyright	3
Dedication	16
Contents	18
Preface	40
Acknowledgments	55
Introduction	71
Chapter 1 - Art and Practice of Hatha Yoga	91
Roots of Yoga	106
Getting the Most From Your	204

Yoga Practice	
Learning to Meditate	292
Using the Asanas in This Book	345
Chapter 2 - Standing Postures	351
Mountain	355
Downward-Facing Dog	363
Extended Side-Angle	375
Triangle	387
Warrior II	399
Crescent Lunge	409
Warrior I	421
Revolved Extended Side-Angle	432
Revolved Triangle	444
Chair	457

Standing Intense Spread-Leg Pose	466
----------------------------------	-----

Beam	477
------	-----

Humble Warrior	488
----------------	-----

Intense Side-Stretch	500
----------------------	-----

Chapter 3 - Balancing Postures	514
--------------------------------	-----

Eagle	517
-------	-----

Tree	527
------	-----

Tiptoe Pose	538
-------------	-----

Boat	549
------	-----

Revolved Half-Moon	560
--------------------	-----

Standing Extended-Leg Stretch	571
-------------------------------	-----

Warrior III	582
-------------	-----

Dancer	590
--------	-----

Half-Moon	600
Chapter 4 - Arm-Balancing Postures	613
Inclined Plane	617
Lateral Inclined Plane	627
Crane	638
Peacock	650
Four-Limbed Staff	659
Chapter 5 - Inverted Postures	666
Shoulder Stand	669
Plow	680
Legs-Up-the-Wall	690
Head Stand	699

Chapter 6 - Backward-	714
Bending Postures	
Cobra	718
Upward-Facing Dog	728
Camel	740
Bridge	752
Bow	762
Locust	771
Upward-Facing Bow	779
Fish	791
Cat–Cow	802
Pigeon	810
Chapter 7 - Twisting	
Postures	824
Gentle Spinal Twist	827
Reclining Spinal Twist	838

Simple Sitting Twist	847
Bound Half-Lotus Twist	857
Seated Spinal Twist I	869
Seated Spinal Twist II	882
Chapter 8 - Forward-Bending Postures	895
Seated Forward Bend	898
Standing Forward Bend	910
Head-to-Knee Forward Bend	921
Revolved Head-to-Knee Forward Bend	934
Open-Angle	946
Side Open-Angle	959
Three-Limb Intense Stretch	972
Garland	983

Chapter 9 - Sitting Postures	1005
------------------------------	------

Lotus	1008
-------	------

Looking Within	1018
----------------	------

Baby Cradle	1029
-------------	------

Hero	1039
------	------

Kneeling Pose	1049
---------------	------

Lion	1057
------	------

Cow Face	1066
----------	------

Staff Pose	1077
------------	------

Yoga Sealing Pose	1085
-------------------	------

Heron	1097
-------	------

Sage	1108
------	------

Chapter 10 - Reclining and Relaxation Postures	1121
---------------------------------------------------	------

Knees-to-Chest	1126
Reclining Hero	1133
Reclining Big-Toe	1145
Reclining Bound-Angle	1154
Reclining Open-Leg Spinal Twist	1164
Supported Bridge	1172
Supported Hero	1179
Child's Pose	1187
Corpse	1196

Chapter 11 - Hatha Yoga Routines 1204

Gentle Yoga I	1209
Gentle Yoga II	1218
Yoga for Flexibility I	1228

Yoga for Flexibility II	1246
Vinyasa Yoga I	1256
Vinyasa Yoga II	1268
Vinyasa Yoga III	1284
Sun Salutation I	1300
Sun Salutation II	1310
Moon Salutation I	1318
Moon Salutation II	1331
Suggested Readings	1354
Resources	1360
Index of Asanas	1373
About the Authors	1404